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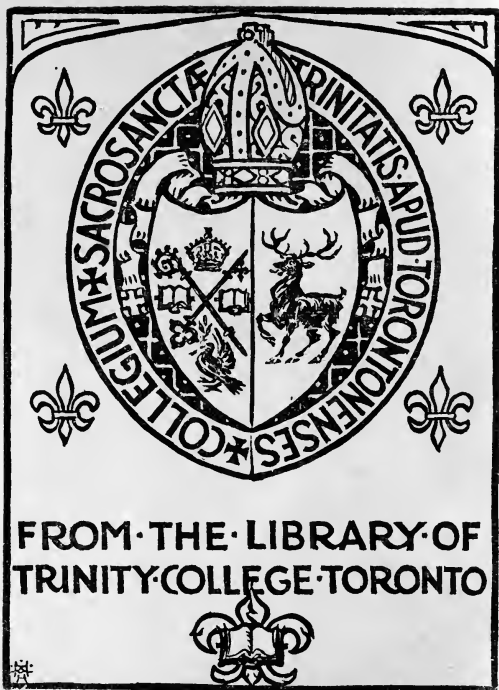
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AN ANALYSIS

OF

BP. BUTLER'S

ANALOGY OF RELIGION,

Natural and Revealed,

TO THE

CONSTITUTION & COURSE OF NATURE.

BY

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THE EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE ANALOGY of Bishop Butler is confessedly difficult of apprehension to the ordinary reader. To be understood at all, it requires much thought and study; and he who thinks of making himself master of the work, without devoting his best energies to the task, will probably find that his time has been spent to no purpose. This must be attributed in part, no doubt, to the abstract nature of the subjects discussed, and to the subtilty of the arguments employed; but partly also to the obscurity of the style, which arises from the great anxiety of the writer to guard against every objection, both open and latent, which could possibly be urged by an opponent.

It is hoped therefore that this attempt to render the ANALOGY more generally accessible, may not be deemed either unnecessary or presumptuous. Amidst the growing intelligence of the times, it is of the greatest importance that the minds of the young should be pre-occupied by Truth against the sophistries of error; and if, by an elementary work like the present, the arguments of an immortal treatise like Bishop

Butler's can be brought to bear upon those whom otherwise they would not have reached, much good may be effected, and the way prepared for a fuller and more accurate knowledge of natural and revealed religion.

In preparing a second edition for the press, great care has been taken in the revision of the whole work ; and the Editor commends it once more to the public, as designed by no means to supersede, but to prepare the way for, the ANALOGY.

January 4, 1850.

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

PROBABLE evidence differs from demonstrative in admitting degrees, which vary from the lowest presumption to the highest moral certainty. We cannot indeed upon a slight presumption affirm a thing to be probably true, because there may be probabilities against it; and even if there be not, conviction does not ensue. The slightest presumption however is of the nature of probability, because when often repeated it amounts to moral certainty. Thus, the ebbing of the tide to-day affords the lowest presumption that it will ebb to-morrow; but having done so for ages, we are fully assured that it will do so again.

That which constitutes probability, is expressed by the word *likely*; that is, like some truth or true event. For when we determine that an event will probably come to pass, we do so from remarking in it a likeness to some similar event that has already happened under similar circumstances, and at like distances of time

and space. Hence our belief that a child will at manhood attain to maturity, that food will sustain its life, and the want of it cause its destruction. And thus the prince, who had lived in a warm climate, believed the congelation of water to be impossible, because he had always noticed the contrary. We from analogy presume that there may be frost in England on any given day in January ; probably, during the month ; we are morally certain that there will be frost some part or other of the winter.

Probable evidence is naturally imperfect, and relative to beings only of finite capacities ; for nothing can be probable to an infinite Intelligence. To us, probability is the guide of life. Hence, in questions of difficulty, where other evidence cannot be obtained, the least presumption on one side will, if opposed by nothing on the other, determine a question in speculative matters ; and in practical, will influence the conduct even in cases of the greatest doubt. For surely a man is bound to do what on the whole appears to be for his happiness, as much as what he knows with certainty to be so. And in matters of great consequence, a reasonable man will remark even lower probabilities and will act with vigour, not only where the chances are even, but where there is a probability against his succeeding^a.

It is not my intention to enter further into the nature of probability, or to guard against the errors to which reasoning by analogy is liable. I shall not pretend to say how far this reasoning may be reduced

^a See Chap. vi. Part II.

to general heads, and formed into a system. But though little has hitherto been attempted by those who have treated of the intellectual powers, we may still rest assured that analogy is of weight in various degrees towards determining our judgment or practice. Nor does it cease to be of weight in those cases, because others may be found in which it confessedly has none. It is sufficient to observe, that this mode of arguing is just, natural, and conclusive. Hence the remark of Origen, that he who believes Scripture to have proceeded from the Author of Nature, may expect to find in it the same difficulties as are found in the constitution of things. To which it may be added, that he who denies the Scripture to have been from God, may for the same reason deny that the world was formed by Him. On the other hand, if there be an analogy or likeness between Revelation and nature, this is a presumption that both have the same Author and cause.

To form our notions of the government of the world upon unfounded reasoning, is to build upon hypothesis, like Descartes. To form our notions upon reasoning from certain principles applied to doubtful cases, is a similar error. But it is just to join abstract reasoning with the observation of facts, and to argue from things known to others like them ; from the visible divine government, and from what is present, to what is likely to be hereafter. This method being practical, and evidently conclusive in various degrees, my design is to apply it to the subject of religion, natural and revealed ; taking for proved, that there is an intelligent Author of Nature, and natural Governor of the world.

But, as there are some who, instead of attending to the actual constitution of nature, form their notions of God's government upon hypothesis ; so there are others, who vainly conjecture how the world might possibly have been framed upon a more perfect model. Now if we suppose a man to go on in his reveries till he has fixed upon some plan which appears the best, might we not conclude even beforehand that such a plan would not be to his mind the *very* best, either as encouraging virtue, or as productive of the greatest happiness, or as tending to both ? And what would be the amount of these improvements ? There would be no stopping until we came to some such conclusion as this ; that all creatures should at first be made as perfect and happy as possible, that no danger should be thrown in their way, that they should in the end do what was right and most conducive to happiness, and that the whole method of government by punishments should be rejected as absurd and contrary to happiness.

Without considering the details of this plan, it may be sufficient to say that we have not faculties for this kind of speculation ; for though we can determine some ends to be absolutely preferable to others,—and we must conclude that the ultimate end designed by Providence is the greatest virtue and happiness,—yet we cannot judge what particular disposition of things is most friendly to virtue, or what means might be absolutely necessary to produce the most happiness in such a system as our world. So far are we from being judges of this, that we cannot even judge what may be the necessary means of raising even one person to

the highest perfection and happiness ; and we find that men of different education and ranks are not even competent judges of each other's conduct. Our whole nature leads us to ascribe all moral perfection to God ; and hence we conclude that virtue will ultimately be the happiness, and vice the misery, of every creature ; that order and regularity will finally prevail, though we are unable to judge how this will be accomplished. Let us then turn our thoughts to what we experience to be the conduct of nature ; and let us compare the known course of things with the moral system of nature, and see whether they are not analogous, and may not both be traced to the same general laws, and the same principles of divine conduct.

This analogy is of wide extent, and consists of several parts, more or less exact ; in some cases, amounting to proof ; in others, to confirmation of what may be proved other ways. With respect to religion, analogy will prove that it is not a subject of ridicule, unless the system of nature be so likewise. And it will answer almost all objections against the system of natural and revealed religion, and in some measure the objections against its evidence.

The idea of a Divine Government comprehends several particulars ; that there will be a future state of rewards and punishments, according to our behaviour here ; that our present life is a state of probation, trial, and discipline ; that this world lieth in wickedness and ruin, and that in consequence of man's corruption there was occasion for a further Revelation, unfolding a dispensation carried on by a Mediator, in order to the recovery of mankind ; and proved not by

the strongest evidence, but by such only as the wisdom of God thought fit.

The design of this treatise is to shew that the principal parts objected to in the Christian dispensation are analogous to what is experienced in the constitution of things, and might with equal truth be alleged against it; and that this argument from analogy is in general unanswerable, and of great weight on the side of religion, notwithstanding all objections to the contrary.

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Argument for
Analogy does not give us demonstration
- but evidence but probable evidence, &
admits of degrees, ranging from a very
lowest presumption to a highest
moral certainty

PART I.

Probability as a very guide of life.

OF NATURAL RELIGION.

B. takes for granted that there is an
author of nature & Governor of world.

CHAPTER I.

Of a Future Life.

FROM the various changes we have undergone, and the different states of life in which we have existed from infancy to mature age, the analogy of nature suggests to us the probability that we may exist hereafter in a state as different from our present as it is from our former. Indeed the very possession of living powers before death leads us to infer their retention hereafter, unless we have some positive reason for supposing that death will be their destruction. But if there be any apprehension of this kind, it must arise either from the reason of the thing, or from the analogy of nature. But we cannot argue from the reason of the thing, because we know not what death is, but merely what are its effects, which do not at all imply the destruction of a living agent. And

besides, as we do not know on what the existence of our living powers depends, nothing is more certain than that the reason of the thing shews us no connection between death and their destruction. Nor does the analogy of nature afford the slightest presumption that animals ever lose their living powers; for though death removes the sensible proof of their existence, we cannot thence infer that it causes their annihilation.

As it is difficult however to silence imagination so as to allow reason to be heard, we will consider the weight of those presumptions which teach us to regard death as our destruction. And,

I. If death be the destruction of living beings, it must be because they are compounded and therefore discernible. But as consciousness is indivisible, so also is its subject. For were the motion of any particle of matter absolutely one and indivisible, so that it would be a contradiction to suppose part to move and part to be at rest, then its power of motion would be indivisible, and its subject also, namely, the particle of matter in which that power inheres; for if it could be divided, one part might move and one not, which is contrary to the hypothesis. In like manner, as perception is indivisible, the perceptive power is indivisible, and consequently the subject, or conscious being in which it resides. Now granting a living being to be thus one,

our bodies are no more ourselves than any other matter. And it is as easy to conceive how the matter of our bodies may be appropriated to our use, as how we can receive impressions from, or have power over, any foreign matter. It is as easy to conceive that we may exist out of bodies as in them; that we might animate differently organized bodies; and that the dissolution of our bodies will no more deprive us of our faculties, than the dissolution of any extraneous matter whatever.

II. Though the individuality of a living agent cannot be proved by experiment, still we may conclude that our bodies are no part of ourselves; for we see men lose their limbs, and even the greatest part of their bodies, without ceasing to be living agents. And indeed the constant flux of bodies teaches us to distinguish between ourselves, and the corporeal matter which is constantly alienated, while we remain one and the same being.

This general observation leads to the following.

First, we cannot determine the bulk of the living being each man calls himself; and yet, if it be not greater than the elementary and indissoluble particles of matter, we cannot suppose that death will cause its destruction, even though it be not absolutely indiscernible.

Secondly, from our relation to corporeal matter, and our subsequent alienation from it, the

living agents, ourselves, remaining undestroyed, notwithstanding such alienation, we cannot infer any other system of matter to be ourselves. For having already lost a great part or the whole of our bodies, why may we not survive the loss of the whole again, when our bodies are dissolved by death?

Thirdly, if we consider our bodies as made up of organs of perception and motion, we shall come to the same conclusion. Thus we find from observation that we see with our eyes, as we see with glasses, for the eye is not itself a percipient; and the same applies to our other senses. This is confirmed by instances of persons losing some of their organs of sense, while they themselves remained unimpaired; and also by the example of dreams, which prove the possession of a latent power of perceiving sensible objects without our external organs, in as lively a manner as with them.

In like manner, with respect to our power of directing motion by will or choice, the destruction of a limb does not lessen this active power, neither is there any appearance of our limbs being endued with a self-directing faculty, though they are adapted, like parts of a machine, to be the instruments of motion to each other; nor again, is there any probability that the destruction of these instruments will prove the destruction of the perceiving agents.

But it is said, all this applies equally to brutes, and therefore they must be immortal. This however is groundless; for, first, suppose brutes to become rational and moral agents,—what then? We know not what latent powers they may be endued with; and, prior to experience, there was once a presumption against our own attainments in mature age. And, secondly, the natural immortality of brutes does not imply a moral or rational nature. And all difficulties as to their future disposal are so entirely founded on our ignorance, that it is surprising they should be at all insisted on.

III. As our present powers of reason, memory, and affection, do not depend upon our gross body in the same manner as perception by our organs of sense does; so they do not depend upon it in such a manner as to give us grounds to suppose, that when our bodies perish, our present powers of reflection will be destroyed with our powers of sensation.

Human beings exist in two widely-different states, a state of sensation, and a state of reflection; to the latter of which it does not appear that any thing dissolved by death is necessary after ideas are once gained. For though our external organs are necessary to convey ideas to our reflecting powers, we are clearly capable of reflecting, when these ideas are once gained,

without the assistance of our senses; and so the body is not necessary to thinking. But further, many mortal diseases do not affect our mental powers, and persons immediately before death sometimes exhibit the highest vigour of life. Hence we conclude, that a disease which, during its progress, has not impaired the mental faculties, will not eventually destroy them. This may be carried further, and we may argue from the slight connection between the powers of sensation and reflection, that death which destroys the one does not even suspend the other; and thus our future life will merely be a continuation of our present. Nay, for any thing we know, death may immediately put us into a higher state of life and reflection, just as our birth did; and even granting that death should suspend our active and perceptive powers, suspension by no means implies destruction.

It may be urged, however, that there is an analogy between the decay of plants and the death of living creatures. But this will not hold, because one of the things compared is void of what is the chief thing in the other, the power of perception. As no probability then of a cessation of existence can be inferred from the reason of the thing, so none can be derived from analogy. And thus, when we leave the world, we may pass into new and social scenes, the advantages of which

may be bestowed upon us in proportion to our virtue, by the immediate will of the great Author of Nature.

This credibility of a future life answers all the purposes of religion, and removes objections as well as a demonstrative proof would. For a future life is as consistent with the scheme of Atheism as our present is, and it cannot therefore be argued even from that scheme that there is no futurity.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Government of God by Rewards and Punishments, and particularly of the latter.

THE importance of a future life depends upon the supposition of our state hereafter being regulated by our conduct here. Without this, we might indeed be curious to know our future condition, but reasonable men would take no further interest in the matter. But if our future destiny depends upon our present conduct, we have reason for the most active thought to secure that interest, and so to behave as to obtain the happiness and escape the misery which we believe ourselves capable of, and which we apprehend to be placed in our own power. All our present en-

joyments and a great part of our miseries depend upon ourselves, for pleasure and pain are the foreseen consequences of our actions, and it is only by the exertion of care and forethought that we secure the one and avoid the other: this is the general course of things, though liable to some exceptions. Why the Author of Nature does not confer happiness without reference to our behaviour, is another matter. Perhaps it may be impossible, or less happiness would be the result, or divine goodness may consist in making the virtuous only happy, and God may be pleased with the moral piety of moral agents, both *per se*, and as conducing to the general happiness. It is certain however that the general method of divine government is a forewarning us, that according to and in consequence of our actions we shall severally receive pleasure or pain.

This must be ascribed to the course, or rather to the Author of Nature; and if the natural course of things be ordained by Him, then the good and bad consequences of our actions are intended as a warning how we are to act. We must not however suppose, that the pleasure derived from indulging our passions was designed as a reward for so doing, any more than our eyes are intended to give us the sight of destructive or unseemly objects. And yet we cannot doubt but that as our eyes are given us to see with, so our passions

are implanted in us for the purpose of directing and regulating our actions.

From this general view of foreseen rewards and punishments being consequent upon our actions, we learn that we are at present under God's government in the strictest sense, just indeed as we are under that of civil magistrates; for the annexation of pleasure and pain to voluntary actions, and giving notice of it beforehand, is the proper notion of government. Nor does it signify whether this be mediate or immediate; for could the magistrate cause his laws to execute themselves, or the offender to punish himself, we should still be under his government, but in a higher sense. Vain is the ridicule of lesser pains, considered as instances of divine punishment; for deny the general principle, and you deny all final causes; admit them, and pleasure and pain must be admitted as instances of them, by which God clearly rewards and punishes human actions. Thus we find that the true notion of the Author of Nature is that of a Governor, prior to the consideration of His attributes. And hence the analogy of nature bears out the Scripture doctrine of future rewards and punishments, inasmuch as that kind of government is already exercised here below.

But as divine punishment is chiefly objected to, we will next consider some circumstances analo-

gous to what religion teaches. We observed that misery naturally follows vice, and being foreseen must be regarded as a punishment. Indeed this is the principle we contend for, that a great deal of what we suffer might be avoided; that future miseries are consequent upon present advantages, and are often greater than the advantages obtained; that though delayed for a time, they come suddenly at last; and that though such distant misery is not certain, it nevertheless follows in a variety of cases. In like manner, opportunities neglected are frequently lost for ever; and though after we have been guilty of sin and folly up to a certain degree we may reform without much loss, reformation is of no avail in many cases where that degree is exceeded.

These things are not accidental, but of daily experience, and proceed from the general laws by which God governs the world; and they are so analogous to what religion teaches, as to be capable of being expressed in the same words. Nothing indeed gives a better idea of future punishments than this, that after many disregarded warnings the temporal bad consequences of a vicious course break in irresistibly, and overwhelm the wicked beyond the possibility of escape. And although we cannot affirm that men are always punished in proportion to their misbehaviour, the very many instances of this sort

answer all objections against the belief of future punishment.

These reflections though not without their terrors are yet salutary, for there is a recklessness with regard to a future state which nothing but demonstration on the part of Atheism can justify ; and men need therefore constantly to be reminded that their presumptions are groundless, even upon the most sceptical principles. May it not be said of some even in a temporal point of view, that it would have been better for them had they never been born ? And can we think ourselves so secure, that, whatever be our conduct, there will be nothing analogous to this hereafter under the government of the same God ?

CHAPTER III.

Of the Moral Government of God.

ALTHOUGH the appearances of design, and of the particular final causes of pleasure and pain, prove the creation and government of the world by a supreme intelligent Mind ; yet this does not at first sight determine any thing with certainty concerning His moral character. Moral government consists in rewarding men according to their actions, as good or evil ; and its perfection is its impartiality.

Some have imagined the Author of Nature to be absolutely benevolent, and in this view His justice and truth will be nothing but benevolence conducted by wisdom. We do not here enquire whether this can be proved, but whether a righteous government cannot be discerned in the constitution of the world. There may possibly be beings to whom God thus manifests benevolence, but to us He appears as a righteous Governor, and of His government He has given us clear but not irresistible intimations.

It is indeed allowed that the divine government which we experience is not the perfection of moral government, and yet it by no means follows that there is not sufficient to give us an idea of its future perfection ; sufficient to stimulate our enquiry how far, beside the moral nature which God has given us, the principles of moral government may be discerned amidst the confusion of the world. The satisfaction which attends a virtuous course might here be urged as an instance of a natural moral government, but it is confessedly difficult so to balance pleasure and pain as to give an overplus of happiness to virtue. Still, however, the principles of a righteous government may unquestionably be found. For,

I. As it is matter of experience that God manifests Himself as a Governor, the question arises, Is He a moral Governor? And if so, be the evidence

of religion more or less clear, the expectation of future retribution cannot be deemed absurd, because the method already begun will then be carried on by the rule of distributive justice. Nor,

II. Must we forget the good and bad consequences of a virtuous or vicious career, which attest the right constitution of nature, and plainly imply that prudence and imprudence must be, as they are, respectively rewarded and punished.

III. From the natural course of things, vicious actions, besides causing an alarm to the delinquent from the apprehension of punishment, are actually punished as mischievous to society, and prove that the divine government is carried on by the instrumentality of man. If it be objected that good actions are sometimes punished and evil ones rewarded, we answer that this is neither necessary nor natural, and that good actions are not punished considered as beneficial to society, nor evil ones rewarded, considered as hurtful.

IV. In the natural course of things, virtue as such is rewarded, and vice as such is punished ; a plain proof of a moral government, though not so perfect as religion teaches us to expect. To see this more clearly, we must distinguish between actions and their qualities. The gratification of a natural passion gives pleasure, and an action by which such a passion is indulged procures delight

without reference to its morality. Consequently, to say that an action procured pleasure or pain, is quite different from saying that the good or bad effect was owing to the virtue or vice of such behaviour. In one case, the action *per se* produced its effect; in the other, the morality of the action. Now virtue as such naturally benefits the virtuous, and vice as such occasions misery to the vicious; vice being continually attended with remorse, and virtue with inward satisfaction and peace of mind. And here might be mentioned the hopes and fears of future retribution, which cannot be got rid of even by those who have thought most deeply on the subject.

And next we are to consider the respect paid by the good to good men as such, and also the infamy which attaches to the vicious as such. To this it may be added that in domestic government, which is doubtless natural, children and others are punished for ill behaviour as such and rewarded for the contrary; and that although civil government regards actions merely as they are prejudicial to society, yet still their immorality tends in different ways to bring the offenders to justice, while the entire absence of guilt will almost of course in many cases though not in all procure a remission of the penalties annexed to civil crimes. On the whole, then, besides the good and bad effects of virtue on men's minds, we

find daily instances of virtue being naturally favoured and vice discountenanced. The fact of our nature being moral, may be urged as a proof of God's moral government over us ; but that this nature has scope to work in, is an additional proof—the first, of final rewards and punishments ; the second, of the working of this system in this present life.

Whence is it then that virtue is thus rewarded and vice punished? It arises partly from our moral nature, and partly from the power we possess over each other's happiness or misery. For, first, peace of mind is the result of well-doing, never of vicious conduct as such. And, secondly, from our moral nature and our power over each other's happiness or misery, vice must be in some kinds and instances detestable, and therefore punished. But nothing on the side of vice can answer this ; for there is nothing in the human mind contradictory to virtue, though there is decidedly to vice.

Happiness and misery are not however always regulated by personal merit or demerit, but are sometimes distributed by way of mere discipline. For the wisest and best reasons the world may be governed by general laws, and our happiness and misery be put to a certain degree in our own power. And though this may sometimes render the wicked prosperous and the righteous afflicted,

yet still the very circumstance of our being so placed that virtue and vice are respectively favoured and discountenanced, is a proof of the intent of nature ; otherwise our mental constitution would be incongruous. But we cannot say that nature intended to reward vicious, and punish virtuous actions, though this sometimes is brought about through the perversion of some natural passion, implanted for other and good purposes which may be clearly seen. We have a declaration from the Author of Nature which side He takes, and so far as we are true to virtue we co-operate with the divine administration ; and thence arises a secret satisfaction, and an *G*implicit hope of something further.

V. This hope is confirmed by the necessary tendencies of virtue and vice to produce their usual effects in a greater degree than at present. These are obvious with respect to individuals, and in a society power allied to virtue has a tendency to prevail over opposite power not so allied, just as power and reason combined will prevail over brute force. Nor is this superiority accidental ; for though in the case of reason, which has confessedly this tendency, there must be some proportion between reason and mere power in order to secure the triumph of the former ; still there is a tendency to prevail, notwithstanding a possibility to the contrary and the necessity of

many concurring circumstances to render it prevalent.

Now virtue in a society has a like tendency to procure superiority, by rendering the public good an object of emulation, by exciting individual diligence, and by promoting truth and justice, the main-springs of civil union. And suppose the invisible world analogous to the visible, or that both form one uniform scheme, the derived power throughout the universe under the direction of virtue must have a tendency to prevail over brute force. Yet the same concurrences are necessary as there are for the prevalence of reason, proportion, time, opportunity, union, the absence of which may prevent virtue from being carried into effect in the present state of things. She is in fact militant here below, but hereafter she may have greater advantages, and her sphere may be sufficient for the full developement of her tendencies. Good men may then unite, for virtue is naturally a bond of union, and cannot but recommend the possessors of it to the protection of all virtuous beings throughout the universe. And suppose this tendency of virtue were perceived by any orders of vicious creatures throughout God's kingdom, it might by way of example reform those who were capable of reformation. This hypothesis is brought forward merely to shew, that, although virtue is not dominant here, it

may yet have full scope hereafter ; and that its present tendencies may be regarded as declarations of God in its favour.

But to return to earth. Could we suppose a society perfectly virtuous for a succession of ages, what would be the natural result ? Faction would cease, men of mind would rule without envy, each would take the part to which his genius was adapted, the rest would submit to their guidance ; public determinations would result from united wisdom, and be executed by united strength ; all would contribute to the public weal, and each would enjoy the fruits of his own virtue. Add to this the influence which such a kingdom would have over the whole earth by way of example. It would plainly be superior to others, for in Scripture language “ the people would all be righteous, and inherit the land for ever.”

If now we consider that the government of the world is uniform, one, and moral, and that virtue and right will finally prevail under one supreme Governor, it will appear that God has enabled us to see the connexion of the several parts of this scheme, and its tendency towards completion, arising from the very nature of virtue. All this may be deemed unimportant, but what would be said were the contrary the case, and vice had essentially these advantageous tendencies ?

But some may perhaps object, that for ought

we know virtue and vice may hereafter be alternately depressed and prosperous. We answer, it is not the object of this treatise to prove God's perfect moral government, or the truth of religion, but to observe what there is in the course of nature to confirm the proper proof of it supposed to be known; and that the weight of the above remarks may be thus distinctly proved. Pleasure and pain are in great measure distributed without regard to desert; and were nothing else discernible concerning this matter, there might perhaps be no ground for the expectation of future rewards and punishments, though at the same time there would be no reason to believe that vice would on the whole prevail. But the things insisted on above strongly confirm the arguments in proof of a future state of retribution. For,

First, they shew that the Author of Nature is not indifferent to virtue and vice, but has declared so much in favour of the former that we can determine from nature alone the probability of the righteous being rewarded in a future life.

Secondly, when God conformably to what religion teaches, shall reward every one according to his deserts in another state of being, this will only be the completion of that moral government of which the principles are now discernible.

Thirdly, from what we experience of the rewards and punishments of virtue and vice respec-

tively, we are led to expect that these rewards and punishments *may be* conferred in a higher degree hereafter. And though this alone is not sufficient ground to think that this *will* eventually be the case, yet, lastly, there is sufficient ground to think so from the essential tendencies of virtue and vice.

On the whole, the notion of a moral government is not fictitious, but natural, suggested by the tendencies above mentioned; and hence arises a presumption, that the moral scheme of government established in nature will hereafter be absolutely completed.

CHAPTER IV.

Of a State of Probation, as implying Trial, Difficulties, and Danger.

✓ THE doctrine of a state of probation evidently implies that our future interest depends upon our present behaviour. Indeed, the notion of a future judgment supposes a temptation to do wrong; otherwise there would be no moral possibility of doing wrong. But the word *probation* expresses more strongly our dangers and trials than the words *moral government*, and therefore requires a separate consideration.

As God's moral government implies a state of

trial with reference to a future world, so does His natural government with reference to the present. Natural government as much implies natural trial, as moral government does moral trial. Hence we perceive how much depends upon ourselves, since in our natural or temporal capacity we are in a state of trial analogous to our moral and religious trial.

Our trial in both capacities must either be external, or in our nature. For, on the one hand, external circumstances may betray us into open misconduct; on the other, vicious persons will gratify their passions from the force of habit and passion. But since external temptations require internal co-operation, so when our passions mislead they are excited by external objects. Hence external and internal temptations imply each other. But since our passions are roused not only in lawful but also in unlawful cases, self-denial is indispensable; and thus mankind, having temporal interests to be secured only by prudence, are urged by passion to forego their real interests for present gratification.

If we observe further how men behave under their trial, both as regards their temporal and spiritual interests, we shall find some insensible of it, others blinded by passion, others following pleasure without any regard to consequences either here or hereafter. It may be added, that as the

✓ difficulties of our religious state of trial arise almost wholly from the bad behaviour of others, so the difficulties of a prudent behaviour with respect to our present interest are increased by a foolish education, by vicious society, and by our own folly, no less than by an open course of sin.

~ We rank low in the scale of creation, and our condition does not seem the most advantageous for securing our present or future interest. We cannot however justly complain, for as prudence generally leads to ease and satisfaction in our temporal affairs, so religion requires only what we are able to perform. And so our state of trial as taught by religion is credible from its uniformity with the general conduct of providence. Indeed, were our natural condition a state of constant security and happiness, it might seem strange that religion should represent our future interests as dependent upon our present behaviour; and it might be alleged, that our condition hereafter was not analogous to our condition here. But since ✓ prudences and self-denial are indispensable to our present comfort and satisfaction, all presumptions are removed against their necessity to secure our higher interest.

CHAPTER V.

Of a State of Probation, as intended for Moral Discipline and Improvement.

THE question now arises, How came we to be placed in a state of probation? a question involved in insuperable difficulties. For though some of these difficulties are lessened by observing that all wickedness is voluntary, and that many miseries have apparent good effects; it is confessedly presumptuous to pretend giving an account of the whole reasons of our being placed in a condition from which so much misery and wickedness arise. It is sufficient for us to know, that our present state is in no wise inconsistent with the perfect moral government of God. To the question then which may be further asked, What is our business here? we answer, that we are placed here for our improvement in virtue and piety, as the requisite qualification for our future happiness and security.

Now the beginning of life, considered as an education for mature age, is analogous to our trial for a future life. For,

I. Every species of creatures is designed for that mode of life to which its nature as well as

external circumstances adapt it. Change a man's character to the greatest conceivable degree, and he will be incapable of a human course of life and of human happiness; for our nature corresponds with our external condition, and our life and happiness are the result of both; so that, without determining the particular life of good men hereafter, there must be some determinate capacities without which they would be utterly incapable of realising its happiness.

II. The constitution of creatures is such that they may become qualified for states of life to which they were once unsuited. We are endued with faculties of perception and memory, and are capable not only of acting but of acquiring new facilities of action. This is the power of habit, but neither the perception of ideas nor knowledge are habits, though necessary for their formation. However, the capacities of acquiring knowledge are improved by exercise. Whether the word *habit* applies to all these improvements, I shall not enquire; but that perceptions readily return to the mind after being once received, seems analogous to expertness in other things, which confessedly arises from habit. There are, in fact, mental and bodily habits: under the latter are comprised all bodily motions which are owing to use; under the former, general habits of life and conduct. And as bodily habits are produced by

external acts, so are mental habits by the exertion of inward principles influencing the practice. Mere speculations on virtue, so far from necessarily forming a virtuous habit, may even harden the heart in vice. Hence, as practical habits are formed by repeated acts, and passive impressions grow weaker by repetition ; it follows, that active habits may be formed, while the motives that lead to them are less and less felt, as the habits themselves are strengthened. Thus the perception of danger is an excitement of active caution and passive fear ; and, by being inured to danger, the former predominates. It appears then to be an appointment of nature that active habits are to be formed by exercise, for the thing is general and a matter of certain experience. Practical principles also, both absolutely and relatively, grow stronger by exercise ; and thus a new character is formed, and many habitudes of life are acquired, not indeed given us by nature but such as nature prompts us to acquire.

III. We should never have had this capacity of improving our habits by experience, had they not been necessary for the employment and satisfaction of mature life, for which nature does not qualify us wholly or at once. Mental and bodily strength are only attained gradually ; and were a person born with both at full maturity, he would be as unqualified for the human life of mature age as

an idiot. And it seems that men would be headstrong and self-willed were it not for some acquired self-government, the want of which renders a man as incapable of society as he is in fact naturally before he acquires knowledge and experience for mature life.

But as we have power given us to supply these deficiencies, so we are placed in a condition fitted for it. The beginning of our days is adapted to be a state of education in the theory and practice of after-life; and according to our behaviour at this period our character is formed, and we become more or less fitted for the different stations of life. This then is analogous to our being placed here in a state of discipline for another state of being; and even if we could not discern how the present life is a preparation for another, yet still we might believe it credible from the general analogy of providence. But,

IV. Taking into consideration God's moral government, and reflecting that virtue is a necessary qualification for a future state, we then see in what respect the present life may prepare us for it; since we want, and are capable of, virtuous improvement by moral and religious habits, and the present life is well adapted for a state of discipline in order to such improvement.

Nothing that we see at present would lead us to think of a solitary inactive state hereafter; but

judging from the analogy of nature, we should suppose it would be a community under the immediate government of God. Nor is our ignorance of our future employment any proof that there will be no sphere for virtuous exercise, or for that frame of mind which is the result of virtuous conduct. This at least must be owned, that as the government of the universe is moral, the character of virtue and piety must be the condition of our happiness. ✓

From what has been said of habits, it is easy to see that we are capable of moral improvement by discipline. But it is not perhaps understood, that our want of improvement may be traced higher than to excess in the passions. Mankind are prone to error, and therefore stand in need of virtuous habits to secure them from this danger. For, together with a moral principle, we have various affections towards external objects; affections which ought to be under its control, but neither excited, nor prevented from being excited, by the principle of virtue. On the contrary, these affections are felt, whenever their objects are present to the mind, even in cases where they cannot at all, or not lawfully, be obtained. Now what but the practical inward principle of virtue can secure us from evil, when tempted by our affections to do wrong? And the improvement of this principle into a habit is plainly a security against ✓

those dangers to which finite creatures are liable from the very nature of particular affections; and what is more, it necessarily advances our happiness, supposing the government of the universe to be moral.

We may hence observe how creatures made upright fall, and how those who preserve their uprightness raise themselves by so doing to a more secure state of virtue. The former is conceivable from the very nature of particular affections, which must be felt when the objects of them are present, whether they can be lawfully gratified or not. And if this be the case, these affections must have a tendency to induce persons to indulge in forbidden gratifications; and this tendency, if not checked, ends in transgression. Thus upright creatures become depraved in proportion to their repeated irregularities in occasional acts. By a contrary behaviour they might have raised themselves to a higher state of virtue, and their moral principle would have been strengthened by exercise. And as vicious indulgence depraves the inward character, so virtuous self-government improves it to such a degree that the danger of error is infinitely lessened. And thus we may easily conceive that pure beings may be in danger of going wrong, and so may stand in need of virtuous habits in addition to their natural moral principle. And as they are

capable of improvement, they are placed in circumstances peculiarly fitted as a state of discipline for that improvement.

How strongly does this apply to fallen creatures, whose passions have obtained the mastery over the law of their minds ! Upright creatures want improvement ; depraved creatures renewal. And for these education and discipline are indispensable, for the subjection of evil habits and the elevation of the moral principle, in order to their arriving at virtuous security.

The least reflection will shew the peculiar adaptation of this world for a state of discipline. Our experience of human frailty, which is such as to admit the possibility, the danger, and the actual event of our becoming vicious and wretched, tends to give us a practical sense of things very different from the mere speculative knowledge that we are liable to vice and capable of misery. And as the snares of vice render this world peculiarly fit for a state of discipline, so they render self-denial necessary in order to that end. Indeed, the practice of self-government naturally tends to form habits of virtue ; and in proportion to the exercise of the virtuous principle, this tendency increases, and a confirmed habit is the result.

This holds undoubtedly to a certain extent, but how far I know not. Neither our mental nor bodily powers can be improved beyond cer- A

tain limits, and possibly there may be something analogous to this in our moral character. But though this world is so peculiarly fitted for a state of discipline, it is far from proving so to the generality of men, who seem on the contrary to make it a discipline of vice. And the viciousness of the world is the great temptation, which renders it a state of virtuous discipline to good men. That it does not prove so to many, cannot be urged as a proof that it was not intended to be so, by any who observe the analogy of nature. For though many seeds and bodies do not reach that perfection for which nature designed them, we cannot deny that those which do attain that maturity answer the purposes of nature. Some may perhaps object that so far as a course of virtuous behaviour proceeds from hope and fear, it is only a discipline of self-love. But obedience, whether it proceed from fear or hope, will by repetition form a habit. And why this nicety, by which some endeavour to depreciate the idea of religion proceeding from hope and fear? For a regard to God's authority, and a regard to our own interest, are not only coincident, but are both of them natural principles of action; and he who perseveres in a good life from either of these principles, cannot fail to obtain that happiness which such a course is calculated to confer.

These observations on the active principle of

virtue apply also to passive submission to God's will. It may be thought that afflictions only can call this virtue into exercise, but experience shews us that prosperity itself begets extravagant desires. True it is that patience will have no scope when sorrow is no more, but still a temper formed by patience may be necessary. For though self-love rightly understood prompts us to obedience as our best interest, the question may still occur, whether it can be so uniformly coincident with the will of God as not to be liable to excitement at some times and in some degree. Hence habits of resignation may be requisite for all creatures. In general, however, self-love and particular affections disturb the mind, and therefore stand in need of discipline. But nothing disciplines like affliction, which when borne with resignation habituates the mind to dutiful submission to the will of God, and forms in us that temper which belongs to the condition of our being, as dependent creatures.

On the whole, such a character is necessary for a mature state as nature does not bestow but enables us to acquire. And this is analogous to our condition in the present life, considered as a state of moral discipline for another. Some however may object to this discipline as altogether unnecessary. But this is nugatory, for we experience that what *we were to be* was to be

the effect of what *we would* do ; that our own acquirements are the natural supply of our deficiencies ; that the alternative is left to us, either to improve our condition, or to continue deficient ; and that therefore it is perfectly credible, from the analogy of nature, that the same may be the case hereafter with reference to the happiness of our future state.

A third point may seem implied in the present world's being a state of probation ; namely, that it is a theatre of action for the manifestation of persons' characters with respect to futurity. It remains only to be added, that probation in both these senses, of manifestation and improvement of character, as well as in that treated of in the foregoing chapter, is implied in the notion of moral government.

CHAPTER VI.

Of the Opinion of Necessity, considered as influencing Practice.

WE have seen that the condition of mankind, considered as inhabitants of this world only, is analogous to their condition as designed for another. If then the opinion of universal necessity is reconcilable with the former, must not the fatal-

ist own it to be ~~reconcilable~~ with the latter, namely, with the system of religion itself and the proof of it? As we have all along taken for granted the existence of an Author of Nature, and as an objection may be made against the proof of this from the opinion of necessity, it is necessary to prove that a fatality, supposed consistent with what we experience, does not destroy the proof of an intelligent Governor of the world. Now when the fatalist asserts that every thing is necessary, this necessity evidently does not exclude choice or preference, because this is what every one is conscious of possessing; and hence necessity does not account for the constitution of things, but only for the circumstances that they could not have been otherwise than they are. And when a fatalist speaks of necessity as the cause of every thing, he must mean an agent acting from necessity; for abstract notions can do nothing.

But further, the necessity, by which such an agent is supposed to act, does not exclude design. So that, admitting the system of fatalism, it accounts as much for the formation of the world, as it does for the structure of a house, and no more. And the appearance of design in the constitution of things proves an intelligent designer acting from choice upon the scheme of necessity, as well as of that of freedom. But does the opinion of necessity, supposed consistent

with the natural government which we experience, destroy all grounds of belief that we are in a state of religion, or is it reconcileable with the system and proof of religion? Suppose for instance that a fatalist educate his son in his own principles, that he eradicate from his mind the very perceptions of blame and commendation, and that the child be then left to judge of the treatment he is to expect from reasonable men in his intercourse with the world, just as the fatalist forms an opinion founded on his system of the treatment he is to expect from the Author of Nature with regard to a future state. It is evident that in such a case as this the correction which such a child must necessarily meet with, when he came to put his principles into practice, must convince him that either his scheme of fatalism was altogether false, or that he had reasoned inconclusively upon it, and misapplied it to the purposes of common life. And in like manner what the fatalist experiences of the conduct of providence, ought to convince him that his scheme is misapplied when applied to religion, or indeed to any matter of practice whatever. On the contrary, none of these practical absurdities can be drawn from reasoning upon the supposition that we are free; and therefore, though we admitted that the opinion of necessity were speculatively true, we must yet acknowledge that it is practically and

experimentally false. And hence we conclude, that, as the whole process of action implies our freedom, we are undoubtedly free. What however we chiefly insist upon is this, that under the present constitution of things we are treated as free agents prior to all consideration whether we are free or not.

As then the opinion of necessity misleads in practical matters, may it not also mislead us in some analogous manner with respect to a future and more important interest? And as religion is a practical subject, it follows that whenever it is applied to religion our conclusions are not to be depended upon. Since then on supposition of freedom the evidence of religion is conclusive, it remains so on the supposition of necessity, which we have just seen is inapplicable in such a case.

But this is not all. We find in ourselves a frame of mind inducing us to act in one way rather than another; and if this be reconcilable with fate in our case, it is reconcilable with it in the Author of Nature. Natural government too, and final cause, imply a character and will in the Governor respecting His creatures. The Author of Nature then being most certainly of some character notwithstanding necessity, it is evident that necessity is as reconcilable with His particular character of mercy, truth, and justice, which attributes are the foundation of all religion, as

with any other character ; for we find that it does not hinder men from being of one character rather than another. Some indeed object, that what on the supposition of freedom is just punishment on that of necessity is unjust ; but then we reply, that the necessity which destroys the injustice of the one, must also destroy the injustice of the other. This shews that our ideas of justice and injustice remain unchanged, even while we suppose them removed ; for there is hardly a man to whom this objection would not at first thought occur.

But does not the opinion of necessity destroy the proof, that the Author of Nature is of that character which is the foundation of religion ? We answer, No. For happiness and misery are our fate in no other sense than as they are consequent upon our behaviour. And God exercises over us a fatherly and magisterial authority founded on truth and justice, which must be the natural rule of government to a Being who can have no competition of interest with His creatures.

But as the doctrine of liberty is perplexed with difficulty, and necessity lies at the root of infidelity, I will now offer a more particular proof of religious obligation, which may be clearly shewn not to be destroyed by this opinion. The proof, from final causes, of an intelligent Author of Nature, is not affected by necessity, supposed

possible in itself, and reconcileable with the constitution of things. And it is a fact, that He governs the world by rewards and punishments, and that He has given us a moral faculty to distinguish between right and wrong. This moral discernment implies an authoritative rule of action, from which we cannot depart without self-condemnation. Moreover, that these dictates of the moral faculty are laws of God, may be thus proved. The consciousness of a rule of action given us by our Maker not only raises in us a sense of duty, but also a sense of security in following it, and of danger in deviating from it. For since God governs by rewards and punishments, the annexing a sense of good desert to some actions, and of evil desert to others, amounts in fact to a declaration upon whom His rewards shall be bestowed, and His punishments inflicted; a presentiment of what we are finally to expect.

No objection then from necessity can lie against this general proof of religion, nor against the proposition that we have this moral faculty; nor yet against the conclusion, that God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked; for all this is confirmed and verified by the natural tendencies of virtue and vice, and by the punishment of vicious actions as such and as mischievous to society.

We observe further that natural religion has

an external evidence, which is not affected by the notions of necessity. Suppose a person to be convinced of the being of a God, the moral Governor and Judge of all mankind, and yet to be unacquainted with history; he would naturally enquire at what time and in what manner this system of doctrine first came into the world, and whether it were believed by any considerable part of it. And should he find that it was discovered at a late period, he would conclude that though the rational evidence of it remained its late discovery gave it no additional probability. Instead of this, however, he would find: first, that something of this system has been professed in every age and country; secondly, that the belief in one God was received in the first ages; thirdly, that there is express historical evidence of this system having been first taught by Revelation. Now these things are of great weight. The first shews that this system is conformable to the common sense of mankind; the second confirms the truth of it, for it shews either that it was originally revealed, or that it is the conclusion of natural reason; the third must be admitted as some degree of real proof, that this system was actually taught by Revelation. This I mention, to shew the presumption that religion came into the world by Revelation, prior to all consideration of the authority of the Book supposed to contain it.

Let us however carefully remember that as speculative reason may be impaired, so also may our moral understanding, if its dictates be not attended to. And this liability to error is a most serious admonition to us to be on our guard in a matter of such consequence as religion, and not to make custom or a regard to our present ease our only moral rule.

These observations are sufficient to influence the actions of reflecting men, provided there be no proof to the contrary. But an objector may perhaps urge: "There are indeed many probabilities which cannot be refuted, and yet there may be greater probabilities on the other side. Indeed, we need not object against the particular arguments in support of an opinion, when that opinion may be clearly shewn to be false. Now the mode of government by rewards and punishments supposes us to be free and not necessary agents, and it is incredible that the Author of Nature should govern us upon the supposition of our freedom, when the contrary is the fact; or that we should be rewarded or punished for our actions hereafter, under the idea of their being of good or evil desert." Here then the matter is brought to a point, and the answer to it is full, and not to be evaded; namely, that the constitution of things proves beyond all doubt that the conclusion from this reasoning is false wherever the fallacy lies.

The doctrine of freedom indeed shews where, in supposing ourselves necessary and not free agents. And even on the supposition of necessity, the fallacy lies in taking it for granted that necessary agents will neither be rewarded nor punished. But if it be incredible that necessary agents should be thus dealt with, then are men free, inasmuch as they are undoubtedly rewarded and punished. And even supposing that men are necessary agents, then is there nothing incredible in the supposition that they will be rewarded and punished, since this is a mode of government of which we have daily experience. On the whole, the opinion of necessity considered as practical is false ; and if necessity, supposed possible and reconcileable with the constitution of things, does not destroy the proof of natural religion, it clearly does not alter the proof of revealed.

CHAPTER VII.

Of the Government of God, considered as a Scheme or Constitution, imperfectly understood.

ALTHOUGH the analogy of nature confessedly strengthens the facts of religion, objections may be urged against the wisdom and goodness of the

divine government to which analogy furnishes no direct answer; for the proof of a fact by no means proves its wisdom or goodness. But still, on the supposition of a moral constitution of nature, and a moral government over it, analogy suggests that this government must be a scheme of government, as distinguished from single unconnected acts of distributive justice; a scheme imperfectly understood, and of such a nature as to form a general answer to all objections. For, first, upon supposition of God's moral government, the analogy of His natural government makes it credible that it must be a scheme beyond our comprehension; and, secondly, a more distinct observation of some particulars in His natural government will shew the little weight of any objections against its wisdom and goodness.

I. Analogy renders it highly credible, that God's moral government must be a scheme, for the whole natural government of a world appears to be a scheme whose parts correspond to each other and to the whole. In this scheme of the natural world individuals have peculiar relations to other individuals of the same species, and species to species. And as every action or natural event has respect to other actions and events, so it is possible that each may have an immediate or remote relation to others beyond the compass of this present world. We cannot indeed con-
G

ture whether all creatures, actions, and events, have mutual relations, but all events have plainly some future and unknown consequences ; so that, if we trace any one into what is connected with it, we shall find that if it had not been for these connections, it could not have taken place at all.

The natural world being such an incomprehensible scheme, there arises a credibility that the moral world and its government may be so too. Indeed, the natural and moral government of the world are so intimately connected as to form but one scheme, and it is highly probable that the former is carried on merely in subservience to the latter. But the thing intended here, is only to observe the credibility that one should be analogous to the other, and that therefore every act of divine justice and goodness may be supposed to look beyond itself, and to have reference to other parts of God's moral administration. Thus the time, the degrees, and ways, in which virtue is to remain in a state of discipline, and wickedness is permitted to have its sway, all the particulars of the divine justice and goodness, may be so related to each other, as to form a system which is as properly one as the natural world is, and of the same kind. And supposing this, we are evidently incompetent to judge of this scheme from the small parts of it which come under our review in this present life. Hence we see how just an an-

swer our ignorance is to objections against the scheme of providence. For suppose a person to assert that the origin and continuance of evil might easily have been prevented by repeated interpositions, or that a scheme of government is itself an imperfection, as more good might be effected by unrelated acts of distributive goodness and justice, the answer to all this is obvious. Our ignorance of the divine government is such, that we cannot justly object to religion from seeing the disorders of the present state. Should a man object to any one dispensation of providence a disregard to justice or a deficiency of goodness, it would not indeed be sufficient to say that we were ignorant of other dispensations of providence unrelated to this; but when, for any thing we know, the parts objected to may refer to other unknown parts, then our ignorance is a satisfactory answer, because some unknown relation may render what is objected to, just and good in the highest degree.

II. The little weight of these objections will further appear from the following considerations.

First, As in the natural world no ends are accomplished without means, so we find that disagreeable means frequently conduce to agreeable ends, and that in cases where we might prior to experience have supposed them to have contrary tendencies. Now supposing an analogy be-

tween the natural and the moral systems of the world, it is credible that what is objected against the scheme of providence may on the whole be friendly to virtue and productive of happiness. Nor ought we to object that we do not see this tendency, or that the contrary is apparent. What we call irregularities may not in reality be such, but may on the contrary conduce to wise and beneficial results, nay they may be the only means by which these results are capable of being accomplished. But though the constitution of our nature which renders us capable of vice and misery undoubtedly contributes to the perfection and happiness of the world, yet some will notwithstanding object that it would have been much better had evil never existed at all. We may however conceive the very commission of wickedness to be beneficial to the world, and yet that it would be infinitely more beneficial for men to abstain from it. Thus in the natural world many disorders work their own cure: many for instance would have died but for the gout or a fever, and yet a madman only would assert that sickness of any kind is preferable to health. But,

Secondly, natural government is carried on by general laws, and as in civil government the wisest and best general laws are insufficient to prevent all irregularities, so it may be also in the nature of things. But then we are apt to think that provi-

dential interpositions might prevent these irregularities. This however would plainly have some visible bad effects, by encouraging idleness, and by rendering doubtful the natural rule of life ; and further, they would have some distant effects in consequence of the relations of things already mentioned. Such being the case, non-interposition, so far from being an evil, is an instance of goodness ; and as this is intelligible and sufficient for us to know, the going any further seems altogether beyond the reach of our faculties.

But it may be said, that as we are unacquainted with these relations, we must judge of religion as of other things by what we know ; and, that the answers here given to the objections against religion may be used to invalidate the proofs of it, as their stress lies so much upon our ignorance. We answer,

First, that, though total ignorance destroys both the proofs of, and the objections against, any matter, yet partial ignorance does not. Thus we may be convinced that a person of such a character will pursue such and such ends, though we may be ignorant of the proper mode of obtaining them ; and hence objections against his manner of acting would be answered by our ignorance, though the proof that such ends were intended would continue the same. In like manner the proof of religion is a proof of God's moral cha-

racter, and consequently of the morality of His government ; but we are not competent judges of the best method of carrying it on. Our ignorance therefore though it answers all objections against the conduct of providence, by no means invalidates the proofs of religion.

Secondly, could unknown possibilities and relations be fairly urged against the proof of religion, yet still moral obligations would remain certain, though the consequences of observing or breaking them would be doubtful ; for these obligations arise immediately from the judgments of our own minds, and we cannot violate them without being self-condemned. And suppose those future consequences of virtue and vice, which religion teaches, to be merely credible, this very credibility will induce a prudent man to abstain from wickedness, and to live in the conscientious practice of what is just and good.

Thirdly, the answers to objections do not invalidate the proofs of religion ; for, on supposition of God's moral government, analogy leads us to conclude that it must be an incomprehensible scheme, and consequently there is reason to believe that could we understand the whole of it we should find the disorders objected to consistent with justice and goodness.

Lastly, the answers above given to the objections against providence are confirmed by what

analogy shews us concerning it, namely, that our ignorance of the various relations in nature makes us incompetent judges in cases similar to this in which we pretend to judge. And therefore to take these things into the account, is to judge from experience, and from what we know; to neglect doing so, is to judge without consideration.

CONCLUSION.

It would appear from what has been advanced, that the present scene of things is connected with the past, present, and future; so that we are placed in the midst of a progressive scheme as incomprehensible in every respect as any thing in the system of religion. For, can any one in his senses say that it is easier to account for the creation and continuance of this world, by excluding the idea of an intelligent Author and Governor of it? or, admitting an intelligent Governor, that there is some form of government more natural than that which we call moral? Certainly not: for without an Author of Nature, we are utterly at a loss to account for the existence of the universe; and, without a moral Governor, for its end and design. This principle has been taken for granted in the foregoing treatise, and the very notion of such a

Being implies a will and character. But as our whole nature leads us to conclude that His will is just and moral ; so we believe that in accordance with this will He formed, and still sustains, the universe in which we and all living creatures bear our part. Irrational creatures act their part without reflection ; but one would imagine that rational creatures must sometimes reflect on the nature of that mysterious scheme in the midst of which they find themselves, and on the issue of which they are so deeply interested. Many things prove the absurdity of imagining that death will be our destruction ; the only reason for believing which appears to arise from the idea, that our gross bodies are ourselves, which is contrary to experience. Hence, the supposition on which we are bound to reason and to act, is clearly this ; that our living powers will survive the stroke of death. And, surely, the expectation of immortality opens an unbounded prospect to our hopes and fears ; for as our nature admits of misery as well as of happiness, we cannot but feel ourselves to be capable of higher degrees of both. And further, we may reasonably presume that our future interest depends upon our present behaviour ; for our experience proves that in the present state of things good and bad actions are naturally rewarded and punished as such. A moral government then is evidently established ; and from considering the

essential tendencies of virtue and vice, we cannot but conclude that it will be carried into perfection in another state of being, so that every one will hereafter be rewarded according to his works. And if this be the case, then our future no less than our temporal interest depends upon our present behaviour, and there is nothing therefore incredible in the supposition, that the same difficulties which embarrass our earthly course may also impede us in our progress to the attainment of that chief and final good which religion lays before us. Indeed, the circumstances attending our condition here are altogether incomprehensible, except on the supposition that the character of virtue and piety must be a necessary qualification for a future state of happiness under the moral government of God, and that the present state was intended as a school of discipline for improving ourselves in that character. And whereas objections are made against the whole notion of moral government from the opinion of necessity, experience shews us that such objections are practically groundless.

These things, which are matters of fact, ought in all reason to awaken mankind, and induce them to consider in earnest their condition and their duties. It is absurd for men to think themselves secure in a vicious, or even in a thoughtless course of life. The credibility of religion arising from experience and from the facts above mentioned

is sufficient to engage them in the practice of piety, under the apprehension of a righteous administration established in nature, and of a future judgment in consequence of it ; particularly when we consider how trifling and precarious are the pleasures of vice. Finally, the proper motives to religion are the proper proofs of it, arising as they do from our moral nature, from conscience, from our natural apprehension of God as a moral Governor ; and from the confirmation of the dictates of reason by *life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel, and the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*

END OF PART I.

PART II.

OF REVEALED RELIGION.

CHAPTER I.

Of the Importance of Christianity.

SOME persons reject Revelation on the ground that the light of nature is sufficient. But no one can possibly think it so, who considers what was the state of religion in the heathen world, and also what its present state is where the light of the Gospel has never penetrated. We cannot indeed say who would have reasoned out natural religion in its genuine simplicity, but it is probable that the generality would not. And even admitting that they would, still they would want continually reminding of their duty, and occasions would arise when supernatural instruction would be of the highest advantage. To say then that Revelation is superfluous, is to talk at random; as much so, as if we affirmed that our present life was so

completely happy, that its condition could not be improved.

Others consider Revelation of but little importance, provided the dictates of natural religion be duly attended to. "Its only design," they say, "is to establish a belief of the moral system of nature, and to enforce the practice of natural piety; and whether this belief and practice rest upon the evidence of nature or Revelation, is surely of no great consequence." This opinion, though not the same as the former, is closely allied to it, and requires a particular consideration.

If God has given us a Revelation, it cannot be a matter of indifference whether we obey or disobey His revealed commands, unless we are positively assured that the reasons for them have now ceased with regard to mankind in general, and to ourselves in particular; and of this it is impossible we can be assured. But the importance of Christianity will appear more distinctly by considering it, first, as a republication of natural religion; and, secondly, as containing a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason.

I. Christianity instructs mankind in the moral system of the world; and, what is very material, it teaches natural religion, free from those superstitions by which it was once encumbered. Indeed, natural religion is as much proved by Scripture, as if it had been the design of God's word to do

nothing else. It may, however, be doubted by the theorist how far miracles can prove natural religion ; but considered as a practical thing, there can be no objections against this proof of it. For, suppose a person to preach natural religion where it was unknown or forgotten, and to declare that he was commissioned by God to do so ; and suppose him, in proof of what he said, to foretell future events, and to work miracles ; would not this give additional testimony to his teaching, and be, as it were, a new proof of the law of nature ?

To shew this further, let us suppose a man of the most cultivated mind a stranger to Revelation, yet convinced that the world was under an infinitely perfect Being ; suppose him tempted to suspect that he had got beyond the reach of his faculties, and thus brought into great danger of being misled by the contagion of bad example ; what a confirmation would it be to him to find, that this moral system of things was actually revealed to mankind by that infinite Being in whom reason had taught him to believe, and that the teachers of it had proved their divine commission by the display of miraculous power. Nor must we forget that immortality is brought to light by the Gospel. The doctrines of a future state, the danger of sin, and the efficacy of repentance, are published in the Gospel with a degree of light to which that of nature is but darkness.

Again, as Christianity served these ends at its first publication, so it was intended to answer the same in future ages, by the settlement of a visible Church, distinguished by peculiar religious institutions. Miracles were a means of introducing the Gospel; a visible Church was established, in order to continue it throughout all ages, to be like a beacon upon a hill, to hold up the light of Revelation in aid of that of nature, and to be a standing memorial of our duty to the great God and Father of us all. The benefit arising from the supernatural assistance afforded by Christianity to natural religion, is what many are slow at apprehending; and yet, who can for a moment pretend that the bulk of mankind in the heathen world were as advantageously situate with respect to natural religion, as they are now that it is laid before them in a manner so well calculated to influence their practice? The objections urged against all this, from the perversion and supposed want of influence in Christianity, cannot be insisted on as conclusive on any but the principles of Atheism; because the law of nature, acknowledged by the Theist to be from God, has been similarly perverted. It may indeed be truly said, that the good effects of the Gospel have not been small, nor its ill effects any effects at all. Perhaps the evils complained of have been aggravated; or if not, Christianity has only been a pretence, and the

dispensations of providence are to be estimated, not from their perversions, but from their genuine tendencies. But,

II. Christianity contains a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason, and in consequence of which several distinct precepts are enjoined. It reveals a particular system of providence, carried on by the Son and Spirit of God, for the salvation of lost man. And it is in Scripture that the relations in which the Son and Spirit stand to us, are alone revealed. Hence arise the obligations of duty which we are under to Them ; and the truth of the case in each of these respects being admitted, namely, that God is our Governor, on the evidence of reason ; that Christ is our Mediator, and the Holy Ghost our Sanctifier, on the evidence of Revelation, it is no more a question why it should be commanded us to be baptized in the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, than in that of the Father.

Religion may be considered under a two-fold aspect ; either as external, or internal. Under the latter notion, the essence of natural religion consists in religious regards to God the Father Almighty ; the essence of revealed, in religious regards to the Son and Holy Ghost. And the obligation of paying divine worship to Each of these Persons in the Trinity, arises from the relations which They sustain towards us in the co-

venant of grace, the one as our Redeemer, the other as our Sanctifier. In what external manner this inward worship is to be paid, is a matter of pure Revelation ; but our obligations to such internal worship are obligations of reason, arising out of those relations themselves.

If this be true, those who disregard Christianity on the ground of the sufficiency of natural religion, forget that it has something peculiar to itself of great importance ; for, the office of our Lord being made known, the obligation to pay Him religious regard is plainly moral, and arises immediately from His office itself. The objectors to Revelation seem to forget, that it informs us of something new in the state of mankind ; acquainting us with some relations we stand in, which could not otherwise have been known. And these relations being real, neglect of them will doubtless be attended with the same kind of consequences under God's government, as the neglect of any other relations made known to us by reason ; and ignorance will be as much an excuse in one case as in the other.

If Christ then be our Mediator, our Lord, our Saviour, and our God, no one can say what may be the consequences of our disregard of Him under these high relations, even in the way of natural consequences. For as the natural consequences of vice in this world are doubtless to be considered as judgments of God, so may the judgments of a

future life be regarded as the natural consequences of our misbehaviour under the relations in which God has placed us.

Again, if man be so corrupt as to be unfit for that state which Christ has gone before to prepare for His disciples, and if therefore it be necessary for him to be born again before he can see the kingdom of God ; it is of the utmost consequence that he use the appointed means for obtaining grace. And surely, on the supposition that Christianity is either true or credible, it is the greatest rashness imaginable to treat it with irreverence. It can never be esteemed as of little consequence, until it be proved to be false ; and its importance, if true, is the greatest possible.

To illustrate the foregoing observations, I would add, that from hence we may clearly see the distinction between what is moral, and what is positive in religion. Moral precepts are those of which we see the reasons ; positive, are those of which we do not. Moral duties arise out of the nature of the case ; positive, from external command. From this distinction, we see the ground of preference given in Scripture to the former. The reason of positive institutions in general is very obvious ; and they, who attend to the thing, will see that they have in general the nature of moral commands, since the reason of them appears. Care then must be taken in comparing moral and posi-

tive duties, that they be compared no further than as they are different; and unless this caution is observed, confusion arises.

This being premised, suppose two precepts enjoined by the same authority, both of which it is impossible to obey; that the former is moral, the latter positive; it is unquestionably our duty to obey the former. Further, the positive institutions of Christianity are means to a moral end, which is of course more excellent than the means; nor is the observance of these institutions of any value, otherwise than as it proceeds from a moral principle. Taking the words, *moral law* and *positive institutions*, in their popular and practical sense, I add that the whole moral law is clearly as much a matter of revealed command as positive institutions. And in this respect they are both upon a level. But the moral law is moreover written upon our hearts, a plain intimation from its Author which is to be preferred when they interfere.

This question, however, is not so very important after all; nor are we left to reason to determine it. For, though men have in all ages been prone to give the preference to positive institutions, the nature of the thing shews us plainly enough that all notions of this kind are utterly subversive of true religion, and contrary to the express declarations of Scripture; and besides, our

blessed Lord taught distinctly, that the general spirit of religion consists in moral piety and virtue, as distinguished from forms and ritual observances. We must not, however, forget the propensity of human nature to regard as worthless whatever on comparison is found to be of less importance than that with which it is compared ; we must remember that our obligation to obey all God's commands is absolute, and that commands merely positive if admitted to come from Him become moral in the strictest sense.

From what has been now said of the importance of Christianity, we see the necessity of searching the Scriptures in order to see what the scheme of Revelation really is, rather than determine beforehand what it must be. If indeed we discover in Revelation any passages of which the meaning appears contrary to natural religion, we may certainly conclude such seeming meaning not to be the real one ; though it is by no means a presumption against an interpretation of Scripture, that it contains a doctrine undiscoverable by the light of nature.

CHAPTER II.

*Of the supposed Presumption against a Revelation,
considered as miraculous.*

WE come next to consider the presumptions against Revelation in general. It is commonly supposed that there is some peculiar presumption against miracles from the analogy of nature, and that stronger evidence is necessary to prove their reality than would be sufficient to convince us of any other matter of fact. But in answer to this, I observe,

I. That there is no apparent presumption from the analogy of nature against the general scheme of Christianity. If there be, it must be because it is not discoverable by reason or experience; or else because it is unlike that course of nature which is. But no presumption can be urged from analogy against its truth, on the ground of its not being discoverable by reason or experience. Take the case of a person thoroughly acquainted with our whole system of natural philosophy and natural religion: such a one could not but be sensible how small a part of the natural and moral system of the universe he was acquainted with, and what numberless things in the dispensations of providence, both past, present, and future, he

could never hope to discover without Revelation. And, therefore, that things should lie beyond the reach of our faculties is no presumption against their reality, for we daily meet with things in the constitution of nature which are unquestionably of this kind. Again, analogy raises no presumption against any of the things contained in this general doctrine of Scripture, on account of their being unlike the known course of nature. For we cannot infer that the *whole* divine government, which is naturally unknown to us, and every thing in it, is like any thing in that which is known; and therefore there is no peculiar presumption against any thing in the former, on the ground of its being unlike to any thing in the latter. Even in the natural government of the world, and indeed in the moral, we see things very unlike one another; and therefore we ought not to wonder at the dissimilarity between things visible and invisible.

The notion of a miracle, wrought in attestation of a divine mission, is sufficiently understood. There are also invisible miracles, such as Christ's Incarnation, which themselves require proof. Revelation also is miraculous, and miracles are the proof of it; and, as the foregoing observations prove, there is no presumption against them from the analogy of nature.

II. Analogy brings no presumption against a

Revelation at the beginning of the world; for every miraculous interposition has reference to a course of nature, and implies something different from it. But at the time supposed, there either was no course of nature, or if there were, we do not know what it was. Hence the question of a primeval Revelation becomes a question of fact concerning which tradition may be alleged as in other ordinary cases, and there is consequently no peculiar presumption from analogy against it. Add to this, that there does not appear the least intimation that religion was first reasoned out, but there is every evidence on the other side to prove that it came by Revelation.

III. But still it may be urged that there is some peculiar presumption from analogy against miracles, after the settlement of a course of nature. Before however we can raise an argument from analogy, either for or against Revelation, we must be acquainted with a parallel case, that of some other world, seemingly in like circumstances with our own, which it is obvious we cannot meet with, and even could we meet with a single presumptive proof, from being informed whether such a world had a Revelation or not, it would from being single be infinitely precarious. For, first, there is a very strong presumption against the most ordinary facts, prior to the proof of them. And hence we see that the question of importance is

the case before us turns upon the degree of peculiar presumption which is supposed to exist against miracles, whether in fact it be such as to render them incredible. Secondly, if we leave out the consideration of religion, we are totally at a loss to account for the causes on which the present course of nature depends, and therefore it does not seem improbable that a lapse of five or six thousand years may have given occasion for miraculous interposition. It is evident then that there is a greater presumption against any particular common facts, than against miracles in general, prior to any evidence for either. But, thirdly, take in the consideration of religion, and then we see particular reasons for miracles, to afford mankind instruction additional to that of nature, and to attest the truth of it. Lastly, miracles must not be compared to ordinary events, but rather to extraordinary phenomena; and then the comparison will be between the presumption against miracles, and that against the phenomena of nature. And before this can be determined, we must consider what upon first hearing would be the presumption against the last-mentioned appearances, to one only acquainted with the ordinary operations of nature.

On the whole, while there is no fair presumption against miracles, there are reasons for them which give a positive credibility to the history of them, wherever these reasons hold.

CHAPTER III.

Of our Incapacity of judging what was to be expected in a Revelation; and the Credibility, from Analogy, that it must contain things which appear liable to objections.

MANY objections have been alleged against the whole scheme of Christianity. But it is sufficient to observe with respect to them, that upon supposition of a Revelation, it is highly credible beforehand that we should be incompetent judges of it to a great degree, and that it would be liable to great objections in case we should judge of it otherwise than by the analogy of nature. And therefore, though objections against the evidence of Christianity require the most serious consideration, objections against the scheme itself are mostly frivolous. To prove this, is the general design of the present chapter.

As God governs the world by certain laws of nature, so the Scriptures inform us of a scheme of divine providence additional to this. They teach us that God has revealed to us things concerning His government, which could not otherwise have been known; that He has reminded us of things discoverable by reason, and attested

the whole by miracles. Now, if the natural and revealed dispensation of things be both from God, and together make up one scheme of providence; it is credible, that if we are incompetent judges of the one, we may be so likewise of the other. As the course of nature is found to be different from what might have been expected, so the revealed dispensation may be liable to great objections, both against the scheme itself, and against the degree of miraculous interposition by which it was attested and carried on.

These observations apply particularly to inspiration. As we cannot judge beforehand by what laws God would naturally instruct us, so on the supposition of His affording us additional light by Revelation it is impossible for us to say in what manner this light would be afforded us. It is quite frivolous then to object against any one point being left in one way rather than in another, for this would be to object against things being different from expectations which have been shewn not to be founded on reason. Thus the only question is, whether Christianity be a real Revelation; and whether the Scriptures be what they claim to be, the word of God. Now, whatever minor objections may be made, there are none to overthrow a Revelation of such a nature as the Christian, but such as shew that there is no proof of miracles wrought in attestation of it;

nor any thing in the prophecies which foretold it, that human sagacity could not have foreseen. When this is shewn, there is an end of Revelation. But were the proof of any one of these lower than is allowed, yet still while any proof of them remains Revelation will stand on the same footing as before, and ought to have a like influence upon our lives and conversation. Hence it appears that there are several ways of arguing, which, though correct when applied to other writings, are yet by no means applicable to the prophetic parts of Scripture. We cannot say, for instance, that such or such cannot be the meaning of a given passage of Scripture ; for if it had, it would have been expressed more plainly ; because we are not competent judges how plainly it was to have been expected that the true sense would have been given. The only question is, what reason is there for believing that such is the sense of the passage ; not, how much more accurately and determinately it might have been expressed.

But do not internal improbabilities weaken external proof? Doubtless. But to what purpose can this be alleged, when we consider that the strongest internal improbabilities are overcome by the most ordinary testimony, and that we scarcely know what are improbabilities in the matter we are here considering. For though it is manifest that we are not competent to decide what super-

natural instructions were to have been expected, and though the objections of an incompetent judge must necessarily be frivolous; we may go one step further and observe, that if men will pretend to judge of Scripture from preconceived views, the analogy of nature shews beforehand the probability of their meeting strong objections against it, however unexceptionable it may be; for so, prior to experience, they would similarly object to the manner of that instruction which is afforded by the ordinary course of nature. From these things then it is highly credible beforehand, that in case a Revelation were given at all, it would be with circumstances and degrees, against the credibility of which we should imagine we saw objections.

By applying these general observations to a particular objection, we shall see their application to others of a like kind. It appears from Scripture, that in the apostolic age the first converts were endued with miraculous gifts, which however some of them exercised in a disorderly manner; and this is made an objection against their being really miraculous. But, if we take the case of a person endued with any of these gifts, for instance, that of tongues, we must suppose him to have the same power over this gift as he had over any other natural endowment; and that, consequently, he might make either a right or a wrong

use of it, according to his sense of decency or prudence. Where then is the objection? We might indeed have expected that a different class of persons would have been invested with these powers, or that they would have been continually restrained in the exercise of them; but from what has been observed above, it is most clear that we are not judges in what degree or manner God should miraculously interpose. In the natural course of Providence, superior talents are conferred not only on those who are disposed to make a right use of them, but also on others. And in the instruction naturally afforded us for the conduct of life, particularly in our education, circumstances frequently arise to excite our disgust, and prejudice us against it.

One might add, that in other respects nature and Revelation resemble each other. Practical Christianity is indeed plain and obvious; but the more distinct knowledge of divine things requires exact thought and careful consideration. The hindrances too of natural and supernatural light are of the same kind. And as the whole scheme of Scripture is not yet understood, so if it is ever understood without miraculous interposition it must be in the same way as natural knowledge is attained, by thought, study, and diligent investigation. Nor is it incredible that a book, which has been so long in the possession of mankind,

should contain many truths as yet undiscovered ; for the same phenomena, and the same faculties of investigation, from which such great discoveries in natural philosophy have lately been made, were equally in the possession of mankind several thousand years ago.

It may indeed be objected that this analogy fails in a material respect, for that natural knowledge is of little or no consequence. But I have been speaking of the general instruction which nature does or does not afford. And besides, some parts of natural knowledge are of the greatest importance. But suppose the analogy failed in this respect, it might be supplied from the whole constitution of nature, which shews that God does not dispense His gifts according to our notions of advantage or disadvantage. And this in general, with His method of dispensing knowledge in particular, would make out a full and satisfactory analogy.

Others again may further object, that the Scriptures represent the world as ruined, and Christianity as a means of recovering it. Is it then credible, they say, that so many ages should have passed before a matter of such importance became known, that it should then be made known to so few, and that it should lie open to the same objections as are made to the light of nature itself? I answer, this is credible, if the light of

nature and of Revelation be both from God. Men are liable to diseases for which God has provided natural remedies, but of these many were for ages unknown, many perhaps still so ; and besides they are neither certain, perfect, nor universal.

Now, what is the just consequence from all these things ? We must not surely infer that reason is no judge of what is offered to us as being of divine Revelation ; for by reason we judge, not only of the meaning, but also of the morality and the evidence of Revelation ; by reason we ascertain whether Scripture contains any thing plainly contradictory to wisdom, justice, and goodness, to what the light of nature teaches us of God ; by reason too we weigh the evidence of Revelation, and consider the force of the objections alleged against that evidence.

In conclusion we may observe, that frivolous as are the objections considered in this chapter ; yet when a supposed Revelation is more consistent with itself, and has a more general tendency to advance virtue than could have been expected from enthusiastic or political views ; this is a presumption that it does not proceed from them, because we are competent judges what might have been expected from the influence of such feelings.

CHAPTER IV.

Of Christianity, considered as a Scheme or Constitution, imperfectly comprehended.

I. CHRISTIANITY is a particular scheme comprehended under the moral Government of God, consisting of various parts, and of a mysterious economy, which has been carrying on from the time of the fall, and is still carrying on for its recovery by a divine Person, the Messiah, who is to gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad, and to establish a kingdom wherein dwelleth righteousness. And in order to the attainment of this object, after various dispensations preparatory to this great salvation, Jesus Christ came into the world, died, rose again, and is now exalted at the right hand of God. Parts likewise of this economy are the mission of the Holy Ghost, and His ordinary assistance to good men; Christ's invisible government of His Church, and His future return to judge the world. Now little, surely, need be said, to shew that this system is but imperfectly understood. Indeed, whoever seriously considers that part of the Christian scheme which is revealed in Scripture, will find so much more unrevealed as to convince

him that for all purposes of judging and objecting we know as little of it as of the constitution of nature.

II. In Christianity, as well as in nature, means are made use of to accomplish ends. And hence the same answers may be given to objections against the perfection of Christianity, as to objections of a similar kind against the constitution of nature. It shews the credibility, that the thing objected to may be the very best means of accomplishing the very best ends. And their apparent foolishness is no objection against this in a scheme so greatly beyond our comprehension.

III. Christianity may be carried on by general laws, no less than the course of nature; and though these laws are unknown to us, they are no more so than the laws from whence it is that some die as soon as born, while others live to extreme old age; with numberless other things which we cannot reduce to any laws or rules, though they are doubtless reducible to general laws, as much as gravitation is. Now if the revealed dispensations of Providence fall under general laws as much as God's natural Government, there is no more reason to expect that every exigency should be provided for by these general laws, than that every natural exigency should be provided for by the laws of nature.

On the whole, the appearance of irregularities

in nature is owing to its being a scheme imperfectly known: and as it is manifest that Christianity is a scheme but partially revealed, in which means are made use of to accomplish ends, like that of nature; so the credibility that it may have been all along carried on by general laws, no less than the course of nature, has been distinctly proved. And hence it is supposable beforehand, that Christianity would be liable to the same objections as the frame of nature.

We will next, according to the method proposed, shew that the particular objections against Christianity may be answered by particular and full analogies in nature. The thing objected against the whole scheme of the Gospel is this: that it seems to suppose that God was obliged to employ intricate means for the accomplishment of His ends, the recovery and salvation of mankind, just as men from ignorance or weakness are forced to use many perplexed contrivances to arrive at their objects. Now every thing we see shews the folly of this objection against the truth of Christianity; for according to our manner of conception God makes use of many means, apparently tedious, in the natural course of His providence, and consequently the mystery in this matter is as great in nature as in Christianity. We know what we ourselves aim at as final ends, and we know too what means we make use of as conducive to those

ends ; but we are greatly ignorant how far things are considered by the Author of Nature under the single notion of means and ends, and how far it may be said, "This is merely an end, this a means in His regard." So much however is certain, that the whole natural world, and the government of it, is a progressive system, in which the operation of various means takes up a great length of time before those ends can be attained, towards which they are progressing. Thus in the daily course of nature God works in the same manner as in the Gospel dispensation, making one thing subservient to another ; and that, through a series of means extending backwards and forwards beyond our utmost view.

CHAPTER V.

Of the Particular System of Christianity ; the Appointment of a Mediator, and the Redemption of the World by Him.

No part of Christianity has been more fiercely assailed than the doctrine of the mediation of Christ ; and yet, when fairly considered, none is less liable to objection. For,

I. The whole analogy of nature removes all imagined presumption against the notion of a

Mediator between God and man. The visible government of God is carried on, and all our natural blessings are conferred, through the instrumentality and means of others ; and hence no objections can be raised from the light of nature against this doctrine, since we find from experience that God does actually appoint mediators to be the instruments of His justice and mercy towards us.

II. The supposition that we are under the proper moral government of God, requires here a distinct notice. The divine moral government which religion teaches, implies that by God's appointment the consequence of vice will be misery in a future state of being. But, as we are not acquainted with the reasons for which future punishments will be inflicted, it is not improbable they may follow wickedness in the way of natural consequence from God's original constitution of the world ; from the nature He has given us, and from the condition in which He has placed us.

Some good men may perhaps take umbrage at this view, as if it were taking the execution of justice out of God's hands, and giving it to nature. But they should remember, that when we speak of nature, we speak of nature's God ; and that Scripture ascribes to divine justice those punishments which must be termed natural, in contradistinction to such as are miraculous. After all, as the future punishment of the wicked will

doubtless be regulated by reason and justice, it makes no difference whether we suppose it inflicted in a manner analogous to the infliction of temporal punishments, or in some other way ; for the supposition is plainly not incredible, that the punishment of the wicked may either be consequent upon wickedness, or else be regulated by the general and established laws of the universe.

III. We may observe too in nature the provision which has been made to prevent the natural bad consequences of men's actions. We are apt to think that the constitution of the world might have been such, as to have prevented the introduction of misery at all. On the contrary, however, we find that evil is permitted ; but that the Author of Nature has so far interposed on our behalf, as to provide us with remedies which, in many cases, prevent the destruction which must otherwise have ensued. And this is an instance both of severity and of mercy in the constitution of things. Now suppose it to have been so constituted that, after the commission of such actions as were foreseen to be productive of misery, misery had been inevitable, we could not justly have complained. But that the contrary is the case, is the result of mercy ; and hence we might according to the analogy of nature be led to hope, that notwithstanding the ruin naturally consequent upon vice provision might still be made for preventing

those consequences from inevitably and universally following.

Many will doubtless wonder at finding this made a question. The generality of mankind, far from feeling unhappy at the state of misery which abounds, think but little about the matter. But let us observe what we frequently experience to be the effects of irregular and disorderly behaviour, misery, ruin, death, and it will appear that as no one can say how fatal the unprevented consequences of vice may be, so it is by no means certain how far these consequences could possibly be prevented consistently with the moral constitution of nature. There would however be reason to hope, that the universal government might not be so strict as to exclude all hope of pardon. But,

IV. It seems improbable that any thing we could do would alone prevent the consequences of sin from being inflicted. The contrary at least cannot be maintained, for we are unacquainted with the whole of the case. The reasons which render necessary the infliction of future punishments are unknown to us, and consequently we are unable to say whether any thing we could do would cause them to be remitted. We do not know the whole natural consequences of vice, nor how they follow it if not prevented; and therefore we cannot say what we can do to prevent

them. Let us then retrace the analogy of nature, which will be sufficient to answer a mere arbitrary assertion, urged as an objection against a doctrine of which the proof is not reason but Revelation. Consider thus: people ruin themselves by extravagance, bring diseases on themselves by excess, incur the penalties of the laws, (and surely civil government is natural;) will sorrow for the past, and future good behaviour, alone prevent the natural consequences of such a course? Certainly not: and if this be our case, considered merely as inhabitants of this world, and as having a temporal interest here, why may it not be our case also in our more important capacity? Why is it not credible, that if we are obnoxious to future punishment, our future good behaviour may be wholly insufficient to prevent our punishment, or to put us in the condition we should have been in had we preserved our innocence?

We speak it with reverence, but it is plainly contrary to all our notions of government, and of the general constitution of nature, to suppose that doing well for the future should in all cases prevent the punishment annexed to disobedience; nor can we tell in what cases, or in what degree, reformation would have the desired effect. And though the efficacy of repentance alone has been much insisted on in opposition to Christianity, yet from the general prevalence of sacrifices in

the heathen world this notion would seem repugnant to the general sentiments of mankind. We conclude then, that had the general laws of God's government been permitted to operate without any interposition on our behalf, future punishments must inevitably have followed notwithstanding any thing we could have done to prevent it.

V. In this darkness, Revelation comes in to confirm our fears respecting the future consequences of sin; supposes the world to be in a state of ruin, teaches the inefficacy of repentance alone, but shews us that there was still in the moral government of the universe room for an interposition to prevent the fatal consequences of transgression. From this source we learn that God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, to the end that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And the Son of God so loved us that He gave Himself for us, to prevent that execution of justice upon sinners which God would otherwise have executed.

Should any thing that has been advanced appear inconsistent with divine goodness, a little consideration would remove that impression. For were we to suppose that the whole creation would have perished had not God interposed to prevent the ruin, even this would not be inconsistent with the most perfect goodness. But still it may be thought, that this view of the subject supposes

man to be naturally in a very strange state. This is true, but then it is not Christianity which has put him into this state. For whoever considers the miseries and wickedness of the world, will think he has little reason to object against the Scripture account of man's depravity. But that the sin of our first parents was the occasion of our being placed in a more disadvantageous condition, is a thing particularly analogous to what we see in the daily course of nature, as the recovery of the world by Christ has been shewn to be so in general.

VI. Christ's office, as Mediator, is thus represented in Scripture. He is the Light of the world, the Revealer of God's will. He is a propitiatory Sacrifice, offered by Himself, our great High-priest. And whereas it is objected that all this is merely by way of allusion to the Mosaic sacrifices, the Apostle expressly declares that the Levitical priesthood was a shadow of Christ's, and that the sacrifices were allusions to the atonement made by the Blood of Christ. The chief parts of His office, as Mediator, may be considered under three heads. First, He was that Prophet who should come into the world. He published anew the corrupted law of nature, and taught us to live soberly, uprightly, and godly in this present world, in expectation of a future judgment; confirming the truth of this moral system by giving

the strongest proofs of His Divine Legation, and leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. Secondly, He has a Kingdom which is not of this world. He founded a Church, over which He exercises an invisible government, and which He has promised to be with unto the end of the world. Lastly, He offered Himself as a propitiatory Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Sacrifices of expiation were commanded the Jews, and obtained also among other nations ; and they were continually repeated, so as to make up a great part of external religion. But now, once in the end of the world, Christ appeared to put away sin by the Sacrifice of Himself. How, and in what particular way, this Sacrifice of Christ was efficacious, many have endeavoured to explain ; but as the Scripture has left the subject involved in mystery, all conjectures about it must be, if not evidently absurd, at least uncertain.

Some have attempted to explain the efficacy of Christ's sufferings beyond what Scripture teaches. Others again have confined His office of Redeemer to His instruction, example, and the government of His Church ; whereas the gospel-doctrine appears to be, not only that He taught the efficacy of repentance, but that He rendered it efficacious by His death ; not only that He revealed a way of salvation for sinners, but also that He put them

into a capacity of escaping future punishment, and obtaining future glory.

VII. Since we neither know how future punishment would have been consequent upon present transgression, nor how it would have been inflicted had it not been prevented, nor why its infliction was needful, nor what that state of happiness is which Christ has gone to prepare for His disciples; and since we are ignorant how far any thing we could do would prevent the punishment to which we are exposed, and recover our forfeited happiness; it is evident that we are not judges, antecedently to Revelation, as to whether a Mediator was necessary or not to obtain those ends, namely, to prevent future punishments, and to bring mankind to the final happiness of their nature. And for the same reasons, supposing a Mediator necessary, we cannot judge antecedently to Revelation what was requisite to be assigned Him, in order to accomplish the ends of His appointment. And hence to object to particular things revealed to have been done or suffered by Him, because we do not see their use and expediency, is highly absurd. But, if we are thus incompetent to judge in the case before us, it is plain that we have no right to object to any particular of Christ's mediatorial office, until we can positively shew that it is not requisite or conducive

to the ends proposed, or that it is unreasonable in itself.

There is one objection of this last kind made against the Satisfaction of Christ, namely, that the doctrine of Christ's suffering represents God as indifferent whether He punishes the innocent or the guilty. But, from what has been already advanced, we may see the little weight of all such objections, which press as much upon the whole constitution of nature as upon Christianity. For the world is a system, whose parts have mutual relations; and when in the daily course of nature the innocent suffer for the guilty, this is liable to the same objection as the instance under review; nay it is stronger in one respect against natural providence than against Christianity, because under the former we suffer involuntarily for the faults of others, whereas Christ's sufferings were voluntary. The righteous government of God does indeed lead us to believe that finally, and upon the whole, every one will receive according to his works, but during the progress of this moral scheme vicarious punishments may be fit and absolutely necessary. Men's follies plunge them into difficulties which would prove fatal to them, were it not for the interposition of others. And as this aid cannot in many instances be afforded without great pains and sufferings to ourselves, we thus see in what various ways the miseries of one may

contribute to the relief of another. Hence, objections to our Lord's vicarious sufferings are made only by those who forget that such sufferings are of every day's experience, and they amount in fact to no more than this, that a divine appointment cannot be necessary or expedient, because the objector does not discern its object, though he must at the same time confess himself incapable of forming a right judgment of its necessity. The presumption of such objections as these seems almost lost in their folly, and the folly of them is yet greater when they are urged against truths of Christianity analogous to those natural dispensations of providence which are matters of experience.

Lastly, not only the reason of the thing, but the whole analogy of nature, teaches us that we must not expect the same information respecting the divine conduct, as respecting our own duty. For though we are sufficiently instructed for all the common purposes of life, it is but an infinitely small portion of natural providence that we are enabled to investigate. The case is the same with respect to Revelation. The doctrine of a Mediator relates only to what was done on God's part in the appointment, and on the Mediator's in the execution of the office. We cannot complain of want of information as to any matter of duty, for the reasons of all the Christian precepts are

evident ; and our duty to Christ manifestly arises out of what He has done and suffered, and the relation which He is revealed to stand in towards us.

CHAPTER VI.

Of the Want of Universality in Revelation ; and of the supposed Deficiency in the Proof of it.

THE want of universality in Revelation is often insisted on as a weighty objection against its truth. It cannot be thought, says the objector, that God would have bestowed any favour upon us, except in the degree which we imagine to be most advantageous, or that He would bestow it upon any, except He bestowed it upon all : suppositions plainly contrary to the general analogy of nature.

They who speak of the supposed doubtfulness of the evidence of religion as a positive argument against it, should consider the evidence on which they act when their temporal interests are concerned. There is frequently great doubt and uncertainty as to what is really for our advantage ; how it is to be attained, and whether the means adopted will be successful ; indeed, it is impossible to balance the probabilities in many cases, so as

to say which side preponderates. There are the same difficulties and impossibilities in making due allowances for a change of circumstances, any of which render men incapable of enjoying what they have eagerly sought, and with difficulty obtained. And yet instances are constantly occurring, in which reasonable men will engage in pursuits that it is probable they will never succeed in; and even make such provision for themselves as it is barely possible they may have occasion for, though they probably never will. Those again who object to the want of light in Revelation, should observe that the Author of Nature frequently bestows advantages upon some, while he denies them to others who stand equally in need of them. And yet, notwithstanding these differences, God exercises a natural government over the world, and prudence or imprudence have their several results under this natural government.

{ As neither the Jewish nor the Christian Revelation has been universal, so has their evidence had different degrees at different periods. Thus the first Christians had higher evidence of the miracles wrought in attestation of Christianity than we have now; and we again have stronger proof than they had, from the fulfilment of prophecy. But further, could we suppose that the evidence which some have of religion, amounts only to this, that it may be true; while others

are fully convinced of its truth, and others have all the intermediate degrees of light and evidence which lie between these two extremes; all this would be perfectly consistent with the conduct of providence in the distribution of its other blessings. If some have received no Scripture light at all; if others have received it corrupted, or divested of its evidence; if others have had it offered to them in its genuine simplicity, but still remain in ignorance of many things not essential to salvation; there is nothing in all this but what may be paralleled by manifest analogies in the natural dispensations of providence.

Nor is there any thing at all repulsive in this statement, if only we bear in mind, that every one will be justly dealt with, and accepted according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not. And may we not reasonably suppose, that the same wisdom and goodness which disposed the Author of Nature to make different orders of creatures, disposed Him also to place creatures of like kinds in different situations? And that as He created beings of different moral capacities, He placed similar creatures in different religious situations, and even varied the situations of the same creatures at different periods of their existence?

The reason of this is also most probably the reason why creatures of a moral nature are not for a considerable part of their time subject to the

sanctions of religion and morality, but grow up to be so as they advance from childhood to mature age. With respect to the particular reasons of these things, we are greatly in the dark ; but the following practical observations may deserve the serious attention of those who consider the present circumstances of mankind a just ground of complaint.

First, the supposed want of evidence in religion may perhaps form a part of our trial, inasmuch as it gives scope for the exercise of our understanding in examining into that evidence. Indeed, there seems no reason why we may not be in a state of moral probation with reference to the exercise of our understanding on the subject of religion, as much as we are with regard to our behaviour in ordinary affairs. The former is as much a matter of choice as the latter ; and it appears certain that the same inward principle which, on conviction of the truth of religion, renders a man obedient to its precepts, would were he not convinced induce him to search out its system with seriousness and impartiality.

Secondly, it is clear that were the evidence of religion in the highest degree doubtful, yet still this doubtful evidence would put us into a general state of probation in the moral and religious sense. For, suppose a man to be in doubt whether his whole temporal interest did not depend upon such

or such a person, no one who had any gratitude and prudence could consider himself in the same relation to that person as if he entertained no doubt. And thus, were the evidence of religion little more in some cases than this, that the system of Christianity or of religion in general is supposable and credible; yet even this ought in all reason to beget a serious and practical apprehension that it may be true, it ought to turn men's eyes to every degree of new light, to make them refrain from all vicious conduct, and live in the discharge of every common virtue. This is the duty and the wisdom of those persons who complain of the doubtfulness of religion. Nay, whoever weighs the matter thoroughly, will see that there is not nearly so much difference as is supposed between the rule of life in those persons who are convinced of religion and in those who are seriously doubtful whether it be true. Their hopes and fears may vary in degree, but the subject-matter of them is the same, and their obligations are alike.

But further, some persons, from their station, or influence, or talents, have it in their power to do infinitely more harm by setting an example of profaneness, than others of less pretensions, in their intercourse with the world; and therefore they are highly censurable for a behaviour, which they must foresee to be of such im-

portance, even admitting the evidence to be as doubtful as it is pretended. For doubt necessarily implies some degree of evidence ; and though, in the case of an even chance, we should in ordinary cases say that we had no evidence at all on either side, there is nevertheless much more for either than for the truth of a number of facts which come into the mind at random. And thus in all these cases doubt supposes lower degrees of evidence, as belief supposes higher, and certainty the highest. Any one who attends to the nature of evidence, will easily see that between no evidence at all, and that degree of it which affords grounds of doubt, there are as many intermediate degrees, as there are between that degree which is the ground of doubt, and demonstration. And though our faculties are unable to distinguish these degrees with exactness, yet in proportion as they are discerned should they influence our practice, and lay us under an obligation of dutifully regarding the evidence of religion in all our behaviour.

Thirdly, the difficulties in which the evidence of religion is involved, can no more justly be complained of, than the circumstances of temptation to which many are exposed, or than difficulties in the practice of religion after a full conviction of its truth. Temptations render ours an improving state of discipline ; and speculative difficulties are of a precisely similar nature, making even a prin-

incipal part of some men's trial. There are circumstances too in men's situations if we consider only their temporal capacity, which are analogous to this in their higher capacity. Thus the chief difficulties with some is, not the doing what is prudent when it is known, but care and attention in order to inform themselves what is really the most reasonable and prudent part to act.

Hitherto we have supposed men's dissatisfaction with religion not to arise from neglect or prejudice; it must however be added, that dissatisfaction with the evidence of religion may possibly be a man's own fault. For, if there are any who never seek in earnest to receive correct notions of religion, and who at heart wish it may not prove true; these persons will hardly be thought in a likely way to see the evidence of religion, though it were ever so true, and capable of being fully proved. The Scripture indeed says, that not every one who hears shall understand, and it matters not by what providential circumstance this comes to pass; whether the evidences of Christianity were originally so left that honest-minded persons should alone perceive its force, or whether it comes to pass by any other means.

But further, the general proof both of Christianity and of natural religion lies open, I think, to ordinary capacities. This proof, however, though real and conclusive, is still liable to objections and

difficulties, which cannot be cleared up without a thorough examination, and a competent degree of knowledge ; and if we neglect to give the necessary time and attention to the subject, we must expect to remain in error, doubt, and ignorance. To this it will perhaps be objected, that if a master were to send directions to a servant, he would take care to make it plain both from whom they came, and what was their meaning. Now, wherever the fallacy lies, it is certain we cannot argue thus respecting Him who is the Governor of the world, since He does not afford us such information with respect to our temporal affairs. There is, moreover, a full answer to this objection from the very nature of religion. In the case supposed, the master gives an explicit order, which has reference to an external action but not to the motive of the action ; whereas the whole of religion has reference to the secret springs of action, and therefore there is no parallel between the two cases. It may be proper to add, that the will of God respecting religion is either absolute or conditional. If absolute, it can only be thus, that we should act virtuously in such or such circumstances ; and if so, it is in our power to do or contradict His will, which is a most weighty consideration. If it is conditional, it will be to this effect : that if we act so and so, we shall be rewarded ; if otherwise, we shall be punished ; and of this conditional will of

the Author of Nature the constitution of nature furnishes us with most striking instances.

In conclusion, we may observe, that, if we are in a state of religion, we are necessarily in a state of probation ; and this being once admitted, there seems no reason why our probation may not be just what it is in those respects which are objected against. For since ignorance and doubt afford scope for probation as really as intuitive conviction does, and since they are to be regarded in the same light as difficulties in practice ; our moral probation may turn upon this, ~~whether we~~ take sufficient pains to inform ourselves of our religious duties, and then whether we act as the case requires upon the evidence which we have, however doubtful. And this we find to be frequently the case in our temporal capacity.

These observations may perhaps seem unintelligible to many good men ; but if the persons for whose sakes they have been written should think so, those I mean who disregard religion because defective in evidence, I would have them to consider whether this be owing to any thing obscure in the argument, or whether it must not rather be attributed to their regard for religion being less serious than even their state of scepticism in all reason requires. And I would call upon them to reflect, that our nature and condition necessarily require us to act upon evidence much lower

than probable; that we have to guard even against possible contingencies, and frequently to engage in pursuits where there is a strong probability against our succeeding.

CHAPTER VII.

Of the Particular Evidence for Christianity.

WE will now consider the positive evidence for Christianity, in order that we may see what the analogy of nature suggests with regard to it. As miracles and prophecy are the direct and fundamental proofs of our holy religion, I will,

I. Make a few observations upon the direct proof of Christianity from these two, and also consider the objections alleged against it.

1. The Old and New Testaments afford us the same historical evidence of the miracles contained in them, as they do of other matters of fact. Both are related in plain and simple language, and their truth appears to rest upon the same foundation. Besides, some parts of Scripture, containing an account of miracles fully sufficient to establish the truth of Christianity, are quoted as genuine from the age in which they were written to the present time; and no other parts of them, material in the

question before us, are passed over in such a manner as to create a suspicion of their not being genuine. As common history, when called in question in any instance, is confirmed by subsequent or contemporaneous events better known, and as the common Scripture history is thus confirmed; so likewise is the miraculous history of it, not only in particular instances, but generally. For the establishment of Judaism and Christianity are just such events as we should have expected, supposing miracles to have been really wrought in attestation of their truth. We may add, that the most obvious account of the reception of this history as true is that it really is so, nor can any other be so easy and direct. A far-fetched and indirect account may indeed be the true one; but when opposed to historical evidence, it serves only to prove that historical evidence is not demonstrative. Hence, the Scripture history in general must be admitted as genuine and authentic, until something positive be proved against it, even though the evidence in its favour were doubtful.

2. St. Paul's Epistles, from their very nature and address, and from the evidence which they have in common with the other writings of the New Testament, are more likely to be genuine than mere historical narratives left to the world at large; and they afford a proof of Christianity detached from all others, which is I think a thing

of weight, and also a proof of a peculiar nature. For the author asserts that he received the Gospel, not from men, but from Jesus Christ, whom he professes to have seen shortly after His ascension. And thus the testimony of St. Paul is distinct from that of the other Apostles. Another circumstance of considerable weight, is his public declaration that he possessed the power of working miracles, a declaration which he makes incidentally and without effort as a thing well known and familiar to his readers.

3. It is an acknowledged fact, that Christianity offered itself to the world upon the allegation of miracles publicly performed in attestation of its truth, and that it was actually received by numbers on the professed belief of these miracles. And in this respect Christianity is distinguished from all other religions, with the single exception of the Jewish. Nor can we suppose that such numbers would have forsaken the religion of their forefathers, and by embracing Christianity have exposed themselves to great inconveniences, perils, and dangers, unless they had been fully convinced of the truth of those miracles, in belief of which they professed to adopt it. This testimony of theirs is real and conclusive in favour of the Christian miracles, because it testifies to facts of which they had the fullest opportunity of informing themselves. It is distinct also from direct

historical evidence, though of the same kind ; for were a fact related by one or more ancient historians, and disputed in after-ages, the belief of such a fact in the age wherein it was recorded to have happened, would be considered as an additional proof of its truth. It must be remembered too that education, prejudice, and authority, were arrayed against Christianity, so that the conversion of such numbers is a real presumption of something more than human in the matter. On the whole, as there is most ample historical evidence in favour of Christianity, it lies upon unbelievers to shew why this evidence is not to be credited ; and whether there be any objections against it of sufficient weight to invalidate its force.

They allege, indeed, that enthusiasts of every age and country have been ready to give up their lives for the most idle follies imaginable. But we must carefully distinguish between opinions and facts ; for though testimony is no proof of enthusiastic opinions, it is a proof of facts. And if the Christians believed those facts in attestation of which they laid down their lives, this belief must be considered as a proof of those facts, for they were such as came under the observation of their senses.

But enthusiasm, it is said, greatly weakens, if it does not absolutely destroy, the testimony of facts in religious matters ; and indeed the powers of enthusiasm are very great and wonderful in par-

ticular instances. But if great numbers of sensible, thoughtful, men affirm that they saw or heard such things plainly with their eyes and ears, and are admitted to be in earnest; such testimony is of the strongest kind we can have for any matter of fact. And yet possibly this evidence may be overcome by the incredibility of the things attested, or by contrary evidence. But until this incredibility can be shewn, or contrary evidence adduced, enthusiasm cannot account for the degree of evidence which exists, when it may easily be accounted for on the supposition, that people really saw and heard what they so stedfastly affirmed that they had heard and witnessed. Enthusiasm then evidently goes upon the hypothesis, that the things attested are incredible, and therefore need not be considered, till they are shewn to be worthy of consideration.

It has been proved, I think, that there is nothing incredible in Revelation in general, or in the Christian revelation in particular. As, however, religion is supposed to be peculiarly liable to enthusiasm, it may be right to observe, that although numberless prejudices strongly influence mankind in common matters, human testimony is, notwithstanding, naturally and justly believed.

It is again objected, that though the apostles and early Christians could not in some respects be de-

ceived, and in others did not intend to deceive ; yet still their general testimony is not to be believed, though truly handed down to us, because they might partly be deceived, and partly from design intend wilfully to deceive others. All this may be admitted to apply, not only to religion, but also to other cases ; and yet human testimony still remains a natural ground of assent, and this assent a natural principle of action.

Others too will object that mankind have been strangely deluded in different ages with pretences to miracles, but it can by no means be maintained that they have been oftener deceived by these pretences than by others.

It is said again, that there is strong historic evidence for false miracles ; but suppose that there were the like in favour of these as in favour of the Christian miracles we should not even then be obliged to abandon both together, for at this rate we might argue that evidence confuted by contrary evidence destroys the credibility of other evidence not so confuted ; or that, if two men of equally good reputation had given evidence in different cases no way connected, and one of them were proved to have given false evidence, this confuted the evidence of the other.

On the whole, this general liability of men to be deceived, and their proneness to deceive others, weaken indeed the evidence of testimony in all

cases, but destroy it in none. And it seems to me, that people hardly know what they say when they affirm that these things destroy the evidence of the testimony which we have of the truth of Christianity. Nothing can destroy the evidence of testimony in any case, but a proof or probability that persons are not competent judges of the facts to which they give testimony, or that they are under some indirect influences in giving it in such or such particular cases. Till this be made out, the natural laws of human action require that testimony be admitted.

Against all these objections to the evidence in favour of Christianity, we must urge the importance of our holy faith, which must have made the first converts less liable to deception from carelessness, and also the strong obligations to veracity under which their religion laid them; and from these considerations there arises a strong and peculiar presumption, that they neither were deceived themselves, nor attempted to deceive others.

What then is the conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing observations? It amounts, I think, to this; that unbelievers must admit the proof of miracles wrought in attestation of Christianity to be of considerable weight, though they will not allow it to be sufficient to convince them of the reality of those miracles. This they must in all reason admit, just as persons will in many cases

acknowledge that there is strong evidence from testimony for the truth of facts, which yet from one cause or other they think incredible. But there is no testimony contrary to that which we have been considering ; and we have fully proved that there is no incredibility in Christianity in general, or in any of the particulars contained in it.

II. As to the evidence from prophecy, I shall only make some few general observations, suggested by the analogy of nature.

1. The obscurity of one part of prophecy by no means invalidates the proof of foresight, arising from the completion of those other parts which are understood. For the same reason, though a man should be unable from any cause to judge whether particular prophecies have been completely fulfilled ; yet still he may be so far satisfied of their completion, as to be convinced of more than human foresight in the persons who penned them. And in like manner, although in consequence of the defects of history the most learned are unable to make out the minute and complete fulfilment of some parts of prophecy ; yet a strong proof of foresight may arise from that general completion of them which is made out, as much perhaps as was ever intended by Him who inspired the prophets.

2. The correspondence of prophecies with the events foretold is itself a proof that they were de-

signed to foreshadow them. Thus, if a long series of prophecies is applicable to the present state of the Church, and the political relations of the kingdoms of the world some thousand years after these prophecies were delivered; and a long chain of prophecy, delivered before the coming of Christ, is applicable to Him; these things are in themselves a proof that they were intended for Him and for those events, in proportion as generally and particularly they are capable of this application. And it is further to be observed, that the ancient Jews applied the prophecies to a Messiah before His coming, much in the same way as Christians do now; and that the early believers interpreted the prophecies respecting the state of the Church and of the world in the last ages, in nearly the same sense which the event appears to confirm and verify.

3. Could we suppose that the prophets had in view other events than those alleged, or that their prophecies are capable of being applied to other events; even this would by no means destroy the force of the argument from prophecy, with regard to these very instances. If we knew a person to be the sole author of a book, and were even assured that we knew all that he intended in it; we should be satisfied that we knew the whole meaning of the book, for the meaning of a book is nothing more than the meaning of the author. But if the

book had been compiled from the memoirs of another of greatly superior knowledge, it would not follow that we knew the whole meaning of the book from knowing the whole meaning of the compiler, for the author might have in many cases a further meaning than the compiler saw. To say then that the Scriptures have no further meaning than those persons thought or intended who wrote them, is evidently saying that they are not inspired, which is absurd, until you have determined that they are of no divine authority. Until this point is settled, it must in all reason be supposed that they may have some further meaning than what the compilers saw or understood. And on this supposition it is supposable also, that this further meaning may be fulfilled. Now the correspondence of events with predictions interpreted differently from the sense in which the prophets are supposed to have understood them, affords the same proof that this different sense was intended, as it would have done if the prophets had not understood their predictions in the sense they are believed to have understood them in; because there is no presumption that they entered into the full meaning of their predictions. And we have shewn, that the apparent completion of prophecy is explanatory of its meaning; so that the question is,—Has the prophecy been completed in any real sense of the words? For such a completion fully

proves a superhuman foresight, whether or no the prophets are supposed to have understood it in a different sense.

How vain then is the endeavour to prove, that the prophecies are applicable to past or contemporaneous events! The matter of enquiry is evidently this; whether the prophecies are applicable to Christ, and to the present state of the world and of the Church, in such a degree as to imply foresight; not, whether they are capable of any other application.

Notwithstanding the justness of these remarks, there are some who will not accept of such imperfect information from Scripture; others, who are not honest enough to attend to evidence which keeps the mind in doubt, and is different from what they expected; and it plainly requires a considerable degree of modesty and fairness for a man to acknowledge an appearance of great weight in this matter, which though not sufficient to convince him shall at least influence his conduct in proportion to its reality.

I shall now proceed to give some account of the direct and circumstantial evidences of Christianity, considered as making up one argument. The thing asserted, and to be enquired into, is this; that besides giving us powers of reason for the information of our judgment, and the conduct of our lives, God has given us, by external Revelation,

the system of natural religion ; and also unfolded a particular dispensation of providence for the recovery of mankind, and their restoration to the perfection and final happiness of their nature.

This Revelation may be considered as plainly historical, for prophecy is nothing but the history of future events. Doctrines also are matters of fact, and precepts come under the same notion. And the general design of the Revelation contained in Scripture may be said to be this ; to give us an account of the world as God's world, in which respect it differs essentially from every other book. This being premised, the Scripture taken together may be considered as containing an epitome of the history of the world, in the view just mentioned ; that is, a general account of the condition of religion and its professors during the continuance of that state of wickedness, which it always supposes the world to lie in. With this account of the state of religion is interwoven a brief account of the political state of things, as religion is affected by them ; but it never gives any account of them for their own sake. It contains however a very general account of the chief governments of the world, as the state of religion has been or shall be affected by them, from our first parents' transgression, to a future period spoken of both in the Old and New Testaments as the times of the restitution of all things, when the mystery of God shall be

finished, as He has declared to His servants the prophets.

31 And observe too the great length of time which the whole relation takes up, the variety of things it treats of, the natural and moral system of the world contained in the very first book; and in subsequent books, the various common and prophetic history, and the particular dispensations of Christianity. All this gives the largest scope for criticism, and for the confutation of whatever is opposed to reason, or common history, or is inconsistent in its several parts. And whereas some imagine the doubtfulness of the evidence for Revelation to imply a positive argument against its truth, it appears on the contrary to imply a positive argument in its favour. For could any common relation of such antiquity, extent, and variety be proposed for examination, it would be thought a convincing argument for its truth, that it could not be confuted in an age of the greatest knowledge and liberty; indeed it is evident that if it were false its falsehood might be proved, which however is scarcely pretended, except on principles which have been clearly obviated.

32 But further, the Old Testament contains a chronological account of the beginning of the world, and from thence an unbroken genealogy of mankind, carried on to such an extent as to make up a continued thread of history for about

4000 years. It contains also an account of a covenant made with a particular people, on whose behalf God miraculously interposed, and promised the greatest national prosperity, if they would worship Him alone, but threatened the most unexampled punishments if they dared to disobey Him ; insomuch that this one nation should continue to be the observation and wonder of the whole world. It foretells that God would raise up from among them the Messiah, to be in a high and eminent sense their anointed Prince and Saviour, and not only theirs, but the Saviour of the Gentiles ; and that the completion of the scheme contained in this book would be something so great that in comparison of it the restoration of the Jews alone would be but of small account. The Scripture further informs us, that at the time the Messiah was expected a Person rose up in this nation who asserted that in Himself the prophecies centred ; that He spent some years in a course of miracles, that He gave his followers the power of performing wonders in attestation of the truth of that religion which He commissioned them to publish ; that invested with this authority they made numberless converts, and that a prophetic history of this religion is given unto the end of the world.

Let us now suppose a person utterly ignorant of history to have this related to him out of 33

Scripture, or himself to make these remarks, not knowing but that the whole Bible might be a pure invention; and to ask, whether the Revelation contained in it were real or fictitious; and suppose that, instead of a direct reply, he were told the following facts, and that he then united them into one view.

First, then, let him be told, how much the establishment of natural religion is owing to the Revelation contained in this book, even in those countries which do not acknowledge the proper authority of Scripture. Let him be told what numbers do receive it as the word of God. Let him take into consideration the importance of religion. And on hearing all this he might, I think, truly observe, that the reception of this supposed Revelation is the most important event in the history of mankind, and that a book of this nature requires its claims to be most seriously examined; and that, before such an examination, to treat it with ridicule is an offence against natural piety. Let him next be informed of the acknowledged antiquity of the Old Testament, and of the confirmation which its history receives from the natural and civil history of the world, and from the late invention of arts and sciences. And as it contains an unbroken thread of history, from the creation to the captivity, let him be told that this history is confirmed by profane history, and contains

nothing inconsistent with itself, so as to give any reasonable ground for the suspicion of its not being a faithful and true account of men, and of things. I speak here of the common Scripture history, as distinguished from the miraculous; and in this there is nothing inconsistent with the manners of the age, nothing incredible in the history of individual character, or in the annals of domestic life. There may be incidents which taken alone may appear strange to persons of other habits, temper, and education; but are there not incidents in the lives of most individuals, which though undoubtedly true are yet equally strange? Now, that a history of such extent and variety should have such an appearance of reality and truth in its contexture, is surely a very remarkable circumstance in its favour. And as all this applies to the common history of the New Testament, so there is a further credibility given to it by profane contemporaneous authors, who confirm the truth of those customs and events which are either incidentally or purposely mentioned. And this credibility of the common Scripture history gives some credibility to its miraculous history, inasmuch as the one is so interwoven with the other, as together to make up but one relation.

3) Let it then be told the person of whom we 3
have been speaking, as an acknowledged fact, that

(4) there really existed such a nation as the Jews, of the greatest antiquity ; that their government was founded on the law of Moses ; that natural religion was their established religion, and that their very being depended upon their acknowledgement of the one supreme God. Let him next be informed that a Jew, claiming to be the Messiah, rose up at the time marked out by the prophecies ; that He was rejected, as foretold, by the body of the people ; but that in the course of a few years He was acknowledged as the Messiah by multitudes of Gentiles, and that not on the evidence of prophecy, but of miracles ; that this religion gradually spread itself for some hundred years under constant discouragement and persecution, and then became the religion of the world ; that in the mean while the Jewish nation was destroyed, and the people dispersed ; that they have remained in this state of dispersion 1500 years ; and that they still remain a numerous people, united among themselves, and distinguished from the rest of mankind by the profession of the Mosaic law ; and that they have become an astonishment and a proverb among all nations whither the Lord has led them.

C This appearance of a standing miracle, in the case of the Jews, may be thought to be answered by those striking peculiarities, which prevent their incorporation with the people in whose countries they live. This, however, is not a satisfactory

account of the matter. Does it at all account for the correspondence between the event and the predictions, or for the coincidence of both with the peculiar dispensations of providence towards that people? No. It only pretends to account for the event taken alone, but leaves untouched the correspondence of the event with the prediction.

As many of these events seem to have verified the prophetic history, so may we expect the whole hereafter to be fulfilled. What has already been accomplished, naturally turns the thoughts of serious men towards the full completion of the prophetic history concerning the restoration of the Jews, the establishment of Christ's kingdom, and the future state of the world under His government. It requires indeed not only knowledge but calmness, to be able to judge thoroughly of the evidence for the truth of Christianity, from that part of the prophetic history which relates to the state of the church and of the world, from the first preaching of the Gospel to the present time. It appears, however, not only to be very material, but also to be determinately conclusive.

Suppose now one ignorant of history first to ⁴¹read the passages above mentioned out of Scripture, and then to be informed of the correspondent facts of which we have been speaking, the joint view of both together must I think have great weight with any reasonable person, greater indeed than

it is easy for us who are familiarised with them to conceive, without some particular attention for that purpose. All these things require a thorough examination in order that their weight may be perceived, and such conclusions drawn as result from their united force. But this has not been attempted here. I have only shewn that the confessed historical evidence for miracles, and the many apparent completions of prophecy, must be acknowledged by unbelievers as real evidence of something more than human in this matter ; evidence much stronger than careless men imagine, and abundantly sufficient to act upon. And this, I think, must be acknowledged even by unbelievers ; for though they may deny that the historical evidence of miracles is sufficient to convince them of their reality, they cannot deny that such evidence exists. They may perhaps say that the conformity between the prophecies and the events is accidental, but still the conformity cannot be denied. They may say of the collateral things above mentioned, that any odd accidental events without meaning may have a meaning found in them by fanciful people. Men I say may talk thus, but no one who is serious can possibly think these things unimportant if only he considers the importance of collateral things in the evidence of probability, as naturally distinguished from the evidence of demonstration. It is often most difficult to deter-

mine the weight of circumstantial evidence, but it is frequently as convincing as the most direct.

This general view of the evidence of Christianity, 43 considered as making one argument, may induce the serious to set down whatever they consider of real weight in the proof of it, and particularly the many seeming completions of prophecy, and they will find that they amount to a much higher degree of proof than could be supposed from considering them separately at different times. For probable proofs, by being added, not only increase, but multiply evidence. Nor should I dissuade any one from setting down what he thought made for the opposite side. But then we must remember that a mistake on one side is much more dangerous than a mistake on the other, and this is always a consideration of the greatest importance in temporal matters. For suppose it doubtful what would be the consequence of acting in this or that manner, yet still if we found that by taking one side little or no bad consequences would ensue, while by taking the other we might experience the greatest, this must necessarily appear to unprejudiced reason of the highest moment towards determining how we were to act. But the truth of our religion must be judged of by all the evidence taken together; and unless the whole series of things alleged in this argument can reasonably be supposed to have been accidental, then the truth

of it is proved. It is obvious how much advantage the nature of this evidence gives to infidels, who can easily object to single particulars as of little weight, while it is impossible to shew in like manner the united force of the whole argument in one view.

Lastly, as there is no presumption against Revelation considered as miraculous, and as the whole and the several parts of Christianity are not only conformable to the constitution of things, but perfectly credible, so the account now given shews that this evidence cannot be destroyed even though it might be lessened.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of the Objections which may be made against arguing from the Analogy of Nature, to Religion.

NOTWITHSTANDING the arguments of the preceding chapters, it will perhaps be urged that it is but a poor thing after all to solve difficulties in Revelation by proving the existence of the same in natural religion; what we want, says the objector, is to clear both systems of all difficulty.

Now, plausible as this way of reasoning may appear, it will be found to originate in half views

which shew but part of an object, and that part indistinctly; and also to arise from the use of indeterminate language. In reply therefore to these objections, we observe,

First, that what men require, is to have all difficulties solved, which for ought we know may be the same as requiring to comprehend the Divine Nature, and the whole plan of providence from everlasting to everlasting. But as we argue from what is known to what is disputed, so it is in no other sense a poor thing to argue from natural religion to revealed than it is to argue in numberless other ways of probable deduction in matters of conduct, as we are continually under the necessity of doing. Further, as it is unreasonable to urge objections against Revelation which apply with equal force to natural religion, it is of importance to shew that these objections are as much levelled against the latter as against the former. And objections which are equally applicable to the systems of nature and Revelation are properly speaking answered, when this application is shewn, provided the former system be admitted as true.

Secondly, religion is a practical thing, and consists of such a course of life as is commanded by the Author of Nature, and will upon the whole conduce to our happiness under His government. Now, if men can be convinced that

they have the same reason for believing this as they have for believing that prudence in worldly matters will be to their advantage, such a conviction cannot but be an argument for them to practise the duties of religion. And if our spiritual interests are infinitely greater than our temporal; our anxiety to secure the first should be greater than our anxiety to secure the second. This seems unanswerable, and has a tendency to influence those minds which fairly consider their real situation, and who are disposed to follow the practical instructions which are afforded them for their conduct in life. But, says an objector, we cannot suppose that if religion were true it would be left upon doubtful evidence, and hence arises a presumption that it is false. We answer, that in our temporal concerns we are continually obliged to act upon similar evidence; and this shews it to be according to the character of the Author of Nature, that we should act upon evidence which this argument presumes He would not appoint that we should act upon.

Thirdly, the design of this treatise is not to vindicate the character of God, but to shew the obligations of men. And first, it is not necessary to vindicate the dispensations of providence any further than to shew, that the things objected to may, for ought we know, be consistent with justice and goodness. And secondly, I have not

endeavoured to remove any objections against the divine justice and goodness, by shewing that the like objections allowed to be valid lie against natural providence ; but these objections being shewn to be inconclusive, the things objected to are further shewn to be credible, from their conformity to the course of nature ; and this I apprehend to be of weight. And I add, thirdly, it would be of weight, even though those objections were not answered. For, there being the proof of religion as above stated, and religion implying several facts, for instance, the fact of future rewards and punishments ; whatever objections may be made against this doctrine as unjust, or unmerciful, or improbable, the observation that God's present government is carried on by rewards and punishments shews that future fact not to be improbable. Fourthly, though objections against the unreasonableness of religion cannot be answered without entering into a consideration of its reasonableness, objections against its credibility may ; because the system of it is reducible into what is properly matter of fact, the truth of which may be shewn without any consideration of its reasonableness. Fifthly, though the analogy of nature is no immediate answer to the objections against the wisdom, justice, or goodness of God, it nevertheless shews sufficiently that the things objected to are not incredible.

Fourthly, it is acknowledged that this treatise is by no means satisfactory; but so would any natural institution of life appear, if reduced to a system, together with its evidence. Indeed, the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence with which we are obliged to be satisfied in the daily course of life, is such as can hardly be expressed. And yet men do not disregard their interest on that account. The evidence of religion then being admitted to be real, those who object to it as not being what they wish, plainly mistake the whole matter. The question is not, whether the evidence of religion is satisfactory; but, whether it is sufficient to improve and discipline that virtue which it presupposes. And the evidence of it is fully sufficient for this; nay, one might add, that whether the motives or the evidence for any course of action be satisfactory, is never, strictly speaking, the practical question in common matters. But the practical question in all cases is, whether the evidence for a course of action be such as to determine the prudence of adopting it; and this evidence is frequently much lower than the satisfaction that such a course of conduct will be for our interest and happiness.

Fifthly, as to the objection concerning the influence which this argument may, or may not, have upon the conduct of mankind; we are not to consider what sort of creatures mankind are; but

what the light and knowledge afforded them requires them to be ; to shew how, in reason, they ought to behave, not how in fact they will behave. This is the personal concern of each individual ; how little regarded by the generality, experience fully shews. But religion, considered as a probation, has answered its design with reference to all those to whom it has been proposed with evidence sufficient to influence their practice ; for by this means they are put into a state of probation, let their behaviour in it be what it may. And thus the designs of providence are carried on, not only with regard to those who accept, but to those who reject, the evidence laid before them. And further, let it be remembered that in this treatise I have argued on the principles of others not my own, omitting what I think true and of the utmost importance, because by others thought untrue or unintelligible. Thus I have argued upon the principles of fatalism which I believe to be untrue, and omitted what I believe to be true, the moral fitness and unfitness of actions prior to all will, which I apprehend as certainly determine the divine conduct, as speculative truth and falsehood determine the divine judgment.

Now these two principles of liberty and moral fitness being omitted, religion can only be considered as a question of fact, and in this view it is here considered. It is obvious, that Christianity

and the proof of it are both historical ; and even natural religion is properly a matter of fact. For that there is a righteous Governor of the world is strictly a fact, and this proposition contains the general system of natural religion. Thus the obligations of religion are made out, exclusively of the questions concerning liberty and moral fitness, which have been perplexed to the utmost with difficulties and abstract reasonings. Hence appears the force of this treatise, which clears Christianity of objections, and strengthens its evidence in a peculiar degree ; and even those who do not believe the Christian system, will be shewn not only the absurdity of their attempts to prove Christianity false, but also its plain and undoubted credibility.

Lastly, though some may imagine that too much stress is here laid on analogy, yet there can be no question but that the argument deduced from it is a real one ; for religion implying numerous facts, analogy confirms all those to which it can be applied ; and being the only proof of most, must therefore be admitted as of great weight on the side of religion, and ought to be particularly regarded by all who profess to follow nature, and to be dissatisfied with abstract reasoning.

CONCLUSION.

HOWEVER we may account for the too general neglect of religion, it would seem almost incredible that those should neglect it, who have had the moral system of the world laid before them, and inculcated by Christianity; for it is a system which carries with it a good deal of evidence for its truth, on its being barely proposed to our thoughts. There is no need of abstruse reasonings to convince an unprejudiced mind of the being and government of God, though they may be necessary to answer difficulties when once raised. Design necessarily proves a designer, and it is intuitively manifest that creatures ought to live under a dutiful sense of their relations to their Maker, and that justice and charity must be His laws to social creatures. The truth of revealed religion indeed is not self-evident, but requires external proof in order to its reception. Yet inattention to revealed religion implies the same immoral temper as inattention to natural religion; for our obligation to inquire into both, and receive them if true, is of the same nature. Revelation claims to be the voice of God, and our obligation to attend to His voice is surely moral. And as it is insisted that its

evidence is conclusive, so it claims to have something more than human in it, and therefore requires a serious examination.

Let us then suppose, that the evidence of natural and revealed religion has been seriously enquired into by all reasonable men; yet many reject both on speculative, infidel principles, and some go even further than this, they deny God's moral government, ridicule Christianity, and take every occasion of speaking contemptuously of Revelation. Now admitting that these persons act upon supposed principles of reason, it is hardly conceivable that they should imagine the whole evidence of it to be altogether inconclusive; and indeed they do not pretend it, but they are fortified against the evidence, in some degree acknowledged, by thinking that the system of Christianity is incredible or false.

To such persons as these this treatise is adapted; for all the objections against the moral system of nature having been removed, it is shewn that there is no peculiar presumption against Christianity which can render it in the least incredible. It is shewn, that on supposition of a Divine Revelation, the analogy of nature renders it credible, that many things will appear liable to objections, and that we must be incompetent judges of it to a great degree. The objections here spoken of are next considered as urged

against the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the Christian dispensation. And it is proved that they admit of the same answer as the like objections against the constitution of things, namely, that as partial views give the appearance of wrong to things which upon further consideration are found to be just and good, so it is perfectly credible, that the things objected against the Revelation of the gospel may be rendered instances of wisdom and goodness, by their relations to other things beyond our view; for Christianity is a scheme as much above our comprehension as that of nature. The objections against Christianity having thus been obviated in general and together, the chief of them are considered distinctly, and the particular things objected to shewn to be credible, by their perfect analogy to the constitution of nature. Thus, if man be fallen, and is to be restored, we might expect, it is said, that this would have been done at once, and not have been left to be accomplished by such a long series of means, and such a various economy of persons and things. But then, when we find that every thing in the constitution of nature is thus carried on, our expectations are shewn to be unreasonable, as the scheme of providence in the redemption of the world may be of a similar kind, and be accomplished in a similar manner. The appointment of a Mediator, also, has been

shewn to be analogous to the general conduct of the God of nature, in appointing others to be the instruments of His mercies. The fallen condition of mankind, too, which their redemption presupposes, so much coincides with natural appearances, that heathen moralists actually inferred the declension of human nature from its original rectitude. And as it was the general opinion under the light of nature that repentance was alone insufficient to expiate sin, so our daily experience shews us that reformation is not always sufficient to prevent those miseries which in the natural course of things God has annexed to folly and extravagance. And yet there may be ground to imagine, that the punishments which are by divine appointment annexed to vice, may by some means or other be prevented, though not by reformation alone. There is provision made in the original constitution of the world that much of the natural bad consequences of our follies may be prevented by the assistance of others ; and by a method analogous to this, when the world lay in ruin and misery, God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son to save it ; and He being made perfect by suffering, became the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey Him. But further, the objections to Christianity, that its light is not universal, nor its evidence so strong as it possibly might have been, have been answered by the general analogy of

nature: The variety of God's gifts, both in degree and kind, among creatures of the same species, is a full and obvious answer to the first; the doubtfulness of the evidence on which we act in common life, is an answer to the second. Doubt, however, be it remembered, always implies evidence, and as really lays us under obligations, as demonstration would.

The whole then of religion is credible; nor does any thing in Revelation differ more from the experienced course of nature, than some parts of that course do from others. And if so, the question is, What positive evidence can be alleged for the truth of Christianity? This has been considered, and the objections against it duly weighed. Deduct the amount of these objections, and then consider the practical consequences from these considerations, upon the most sceptical principles; and it will appear that immorality is greatly aggravated in the case of those who are acquainted with Christianity, whether they believe it or no; because the moral system of nature, which Christianity lays before us, approves itself almost intuitively to a reasonable mind, as soon as proposed. Next, with regard to Christianity, it is to be observed that there is a mean between being satisfied of its truth, and being convinced of the contrary. There may be a serious apprehension that it may be true, joined with a doubt whether

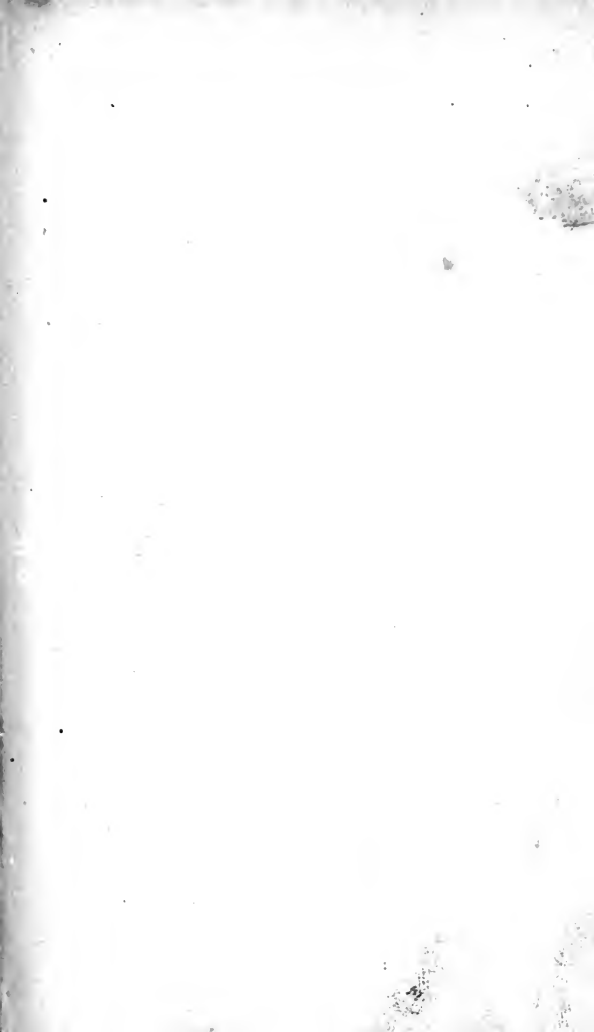
it be so ; and this, it has been shewn, lays a person under an obligation to regard it with seriousness during the whole of his life.

Lastly, profaneness on the subject of Christianity is absolutely inexcusable. For there is no temptation to it, but what arises from the wantonness of vanity and mirth, which are completely out of place on so important a subject. If this be a true account of things, and men still talk, and act, as if Christianity were demonstrably false, there is reason to believe they would not alter their conduct on demonstration of its truth.

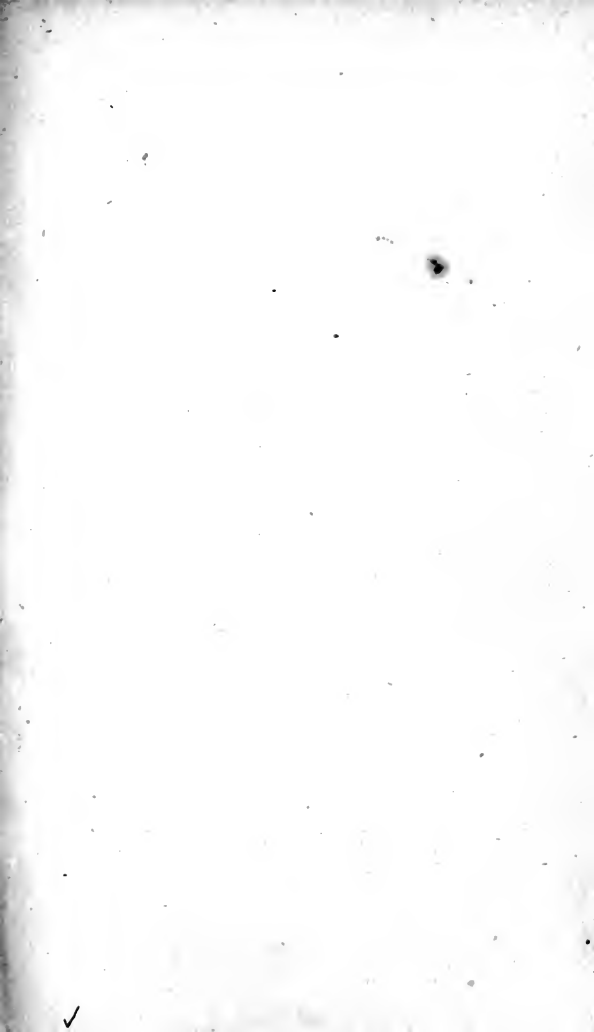
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